QUIN

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"If you don't leave the room instantly, I will!"

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BY

ALICE HEGAN RICE

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TO MY MERRIEST FRIEND

JOSEPHINE F. HAMILL

QUIN

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CHAPTER 1

IF the dollar Quinby Graham tossed up on New Year's eve had not elected to slip through his fingers and roll down the sewer grating, there might have been no story to write. Quin had said, "Tails, yes"; and who knows but that down there under the pavement that coin of fate was registering "Heads, no"? It was useless to suggest trying it over, however, for neither of the young privates with town leave for twenty-four hours possessed another coin.

The heavier of the two boys, Cass Martel,—the lame one, whose nose began quite seriously, as if it had every intention of being a nose, then changed abruptly into a button,—scraped the snow from the sewer grating with his cane, and swore savagely under his breath. But Quin shrugged his shoulders with a slow, easy-going laugh.

"That settles it," he said triumphantly. "We got to go to the Hawaiian Garden now, because it 's the only place that 's free!"

"I 'll be hanged if I know what you want to go to a dance for," argued his companion fiercely. "Here you been on your back for six months, and your legs so shaky they won't hardly hold you. Don't you know you can't dance?"

"Sure," agreed Quin amicably. "I don't mean to dance. But I got to go where I can see some girls. I 'm dead sick of men. Come on in. We don't need to stay but a little while."

"That 's too long for me," said Cass. "If you were n't such a bonehead for doing what you start out to do, we could do something interesting."

One might have thought they were Siamese twins, from the way in which Cass ignored the possibility of each going his own way. He glared at his tall companion with a mingled expression of rage and dog-like devotion.

"Cut it out, Cass," said Quin at last, putting an end to an argument that had been in progress for fifteen minutes. "I 'm going to that dance, and I 'm going to make love to the first girl that looks at me. I 'll meet you wherever you say at six o'clock."

Cass, seeing that further persuasion was useless, reluctantly consented.

"Well, you take care of yourself, and don't forget you are going home with me for the night," he warned.

"Where else could I go? Have n't got a red

cent, and I would n't go back out to the hospital if I had to bunk on the curbstone! So long, *chérie!*"

Sergeant Quinby Graham, having thus carried his point, adjusted his overseas cap at a more acute angle, turned back his coat to show his distinguished-conduct medal, and went blithely up the steps to the dance-hall. He was tall and outrageously thin, and pale with the pallor that comes from long confinement. His hands and feet seemed too big for the rest of him, and his blond hair stuck up in a bristly mop above his high forehead. But Sergeant Graham walked with the buoyant tread of one who has a good opinion not only of himself but of mankind in general.

The only thing that disturbed his mind was the fact that, swagger as he would, his shoulders, usually so square and trim, refused to fill out his uniform. It was the first time he had had it on for six months, his wardrobe having been limited to pajamas and bath-robes during his convalescence in various hospitals at home and abroad.

Two years before, when he had left a lumber camp in Maine to answer America's first call for volunteers to France, his personal appearance had concerned him not in the least. But the army had changed that, as it had changed most things for Quin.

He checked his overcoat at the hall entrance, stepped eagerly up to the railing that divided the

spectators from the dancers, and drew a deep breath of satisfaction. Here, at last, was something different from the everlasting hospital barracks: glowing lights, holiday decorations, the scent of flowers instead of the stale fumes of ether and disinfectants; soul-stirring music in place of the wheezy old phonograph grinding out the same old tunes; and, above all, girls, hundreds of them, circling in a bewildering rainbow of loveliness before him.

Was it any wonder that Quin's foot began to twitch, and that, in spite of repeated warnings at the hospital, a blind desire seized him to dance? At the mere thought his heart gained a beat—that unruly heart, which had caused so much trouble. It had never been right since that August day in the Sevzevais sector, when, to quote his citation, he "had shown great initiative in assuming command when his officer was disabled, and, with total disregard for his personal safety, had held his machine-gun against almost impossible odds." In the accomplishment of this feat he had been so badly gassed and wounded that his career as a soldier was definitely, if gloriously, ended.

The long discipline of pain to which he had been subjected had not, however, conquered Quin's buoyancy. He was still tremendously vital, and when he wanted anything he wanted it inordinately and immediately. Just now, when every muscle in him was keeping time to that soul-disturbing music, he

heard his own imperative desire voiced at his elbow:

"I don't want to go home. I want to dance. Nobody will notice us. Just one round, Captain Phipps."

The voice was young and singularly vibrant, and the demand in it was quite as insistent as the demand that was clamoring in Quin's own khaki-covered breast.

He craned his neck to see the speaker; but she was hidden by her escort, in whose supercilious profile he recognized one of the officers in charge of his ward at the hospital.

"You foolish child!" the officer was saying, fingering his diminutive mustache and viewing the scene with a somewhat contemptuous smile. "You said if I would bring you in for a moment you would n't ask to stay."

"I know, but I always break my promises," said the coaxing voice; "and besides I 'm simply crazy to dance."

"You surely don't imagine that I would get out on the floor with all this hoi-poloi?"

Quin saw a pair of small gloved hands grasp the railing resolutely, and he was straightway filled with indignation that any man, of whatever rank, should stand back on his dignity when a voice like that asked a favor. A similar idea had evidently occurred to the young lady, for she said with some spirit:

"The only difference I can see between these boys and you is that they are privates who got over, and you are an officer who did n't."

Quin could not hear the answer, but as the officer shifted his position he caught his first glimpse of the girl. She was very young and obviously imperious, with white skin and coal-black hair and the most utterly destructive brown eyes he had ever encountered. Discretion should have prompted him to seek immediate safety out of the firing-line, but instead he put himself in the most exposed position possible and waited results.

They arrived on schedule time.

"Captain Phipps!" called a page. "Wanted on the telephone."

"Will you wait for me here just a second?" asked the officer.

"I don't know whether I will or not," was the spirited answer; "I may go home."

"Then I 'll follow you," said the Captain as he pushed his way through the crowd to the telephone-booth.

It was just at this moment, when the jazz band was breaking into its most beguiling number, that Quin's eyes and the girl's eyes met in a glance of mutual desire. History repeated itself. Once again, "with total disregard for his personal safety, Sergeant Graham assumed command when his

officer was disabled," and rashly flung himself into the breach.

"Will you dance it with me?" he asked eagerly, and he blushed to the roots of his stubbly hair.

There was an ominous pause, during which the young girl stood irresolute, while Mrs. Grundy evidently whispered "Don't" in one ear and instinct whispered "Do" in the other. It lasted but a second, for the next thing Quin knew, a small gloved hand was slipped into his, a blue plume was tickling his nose, and he was gliding a bit unsteadily into Paradise.

What his heart might do after that dance was of absolutely no consequence to him. It could beat fast or slow, or even stop altogether, if it would only hold out as long as the music did. Round and round among the dancers he guided his dainty partner, carefully avoiding the entrance end of the hall, and devoutly praying that his clumsy army shoes might not crush those little high-heeled brown pumps tripping so deftly in and out between them. He was not used to dancing with officers' girls, and he held the small gray-gloved hand in his big fist as if it were a bird about to take flight.

Next to the return of the Captain, he dreaded that other dancers, seeing his prize, would try to capture her; but there was a certain tempered disdain in the poise of his little partner's head, an ability to put

up a quick and effective defense against intrusion, that protected him as well.

Neither of them spoke until the music stopped, and then they stood applauding vociferously, with the rest, for an encore.

"I ought to go," said the Radiant Presence, with a guilty glance upward from under long eyelashes. "You don't see a very cross-looking Captain charging around near the door, do you?"

"No," said Quin, without turning his head, "I don't see him"—and he smiled as he said it.

Now, Quin's smile was his chief asset in the way of looks. It was a leisurely smile, that began far below the surface and sent preliminary ripples up to his eyes and the corners of his big mouth, and broke through at last in a radiant flash of good humor. In this case it met a very prompt answer under the big hat.

"You see, I 'm not supposed to be dancing," she explained rather condescendingly.

"Nor me, either," said Quin, breathing heavily.

Then the band decided to be accommodating, and the saxophone decided to out-jazz the piano, and the drum got its ambition roused and joined in the competition, and the young couple who were not supposed to be dancing out-danced everything on the floor!

Quin's heart might have adjusted itself to that first dance, but the rollicking encore, together with

the emotional shock it sustained every time those destructive eyes were trained upon him, was too much for it.

"Say, would you mind stopping a bit?—just for a second?" he gasped, when his breath seemed about to desert him permanently.

"You surely aren't *tired?*" scoffed the young lady, lifting a pair of finely arched eyebrows.

"No; but, you see—as a matter of fact, ever since I was gassed——"

"Gassed!"

The word acted like a charm. The girl's sensitive face, over which the expressions played like sunlight on water, softened to instant sympathy, and Quin, who up to now had been merely a partner, suddenly found himself individual.

"Did you see much actual service?" she asked, her eyes wide with interest.

"Sure," said Quin, bracing himself against a post and trying to keep his breath from coming in jerks; "saw sixteen months of it."

Her quick glance swept from the long scar on his forehead to the bar on his breast.

"What do all those stars on the rainbow ribbon mean?" she demanded.

"Major engagements," said Quin diffidently

"And the silver one in the middle?"

"A citation." He glanced around to make sure none of the other boys were near, then confessed,

as if to a crime: "That 's where I got my medal."

"Come over here and sit down this minute," she commanded. "You 've got to tell me all about it."

It would be very pleasant to chronicle the fact that our hero modestly declined to take advantage of the opportunity thus offered. But it must be borne in mind that, his heart having failed him at a critical hour, he had to fall back upon his tongue as the only means at hand of detaining the Celestial Being who at any moment might depart. With what breath he had left he told his story, and, having a good story to tell, he did it full justice. Sometimes, to be sure, he got his pronouns mixed, and once he lost the thread of his discourse entirely; but that was when he became too conscious of those star-like eyes and the flattering absorption of the little lady who for one transcendent moment was deigning "to love him for the dangers he had passed." With unabated interest and curiosity she drank in every detail of his recital, her half-parted lips only closing occasionally to say, "Wonderful!" or "How *perfectly* wonderful!"

On and on went the music, round and round went the dancers, and still the private in the uniform that was too big and the officer's girl in blue and gray sat in the alcove, totally oblivious to everything but each other.

It was not until the girl happened to look at the

ridiculous little watch that was pretending to keep time on her wrist that the spell was broken.

"Merciful heaven!" she exclaimed dramatically, "It 's six o'clock. What *will* the family say to me? I must fly this minute."

"But ain't you going to finish this dance with me?" asked Quin with tragic insistence.

"Ought you to dance again?" The note was personal and divinely solicitous.

"I ought n't, but I am"; and, with superb disregard for doctors and syntax alike, Quin put a firm arm around that slender yielding figure and swept her into the moving crowd.

They danced very quietly this time, for he was determined to hold out to the end. In fact, from the dreamy, preoccupied look on their faces one might have mistaken them for two zealous young acolytes lost in the performance of a religious rite.

Quin was still in a trance when he helped her on with her coat and piloted her down the crowded stairs. He could not bear to have her jostled by the boisterous crowd, and he glared at the men whose admiring glances dared to rest too long upon her.

Now that the dance was over, the young lady was in a fever of impatience to get away. Qualms of remorse seized her for the way she had treated her one-time escort, and she hinted at the trouble in store for her if the family heard of her escapade.

Outside the pavements were white with snow, and falling flakes glistened against the blue electric lights. Holiday crowds thronged the sidewalks, and every other man was in uniform.

"I left my car at the corner," said Quin's companion, nervously consulting her watch for the fourth time. "You need n't come with me; I can find it all right."

But Quin had n't the slightest intention of foregoing one second of that delectable interview. He followed her to her car, awkwardly helped her in, and stood looking at her wistfully. In her hurry to get home she seemed to have forgotten him entirely. In two minutes she would never know that she had met him, while he——

"Good-by, Soldier Boy," she said, suddenly holding out her hand.

"My name is Graham," stammered Quin—"Sergeant Quinby Graham; Battery C, Sixth Field Artillery. And yours?"

She was fussing with the starter by this time, but she smiled up at him and shook her head.

"I? Oh, I have n't any! I 'm just an irresponsible young person who is going to gets fits for having stayed out so late. But it was worth it, was n't it—Sergeant Slim?"

And then, before he knew what had happened, the small runabout was skilfully backed out of its narrow space and a red tail-light was rapidly wag-

ging down the avenue, leaving him standing dazed on the curbstone.

"Where in the devil have you been?" demanded a cross voice behind him, and turning he encountered Cass's snub-nose and irate eyes.

Quin's own eyes were shining and his face was flushed. With a laugh he flung his arm around his buddy's shoulder and affectionately punched his head.

"In heaven," he answered laconically.

"Funny place to leave your overcoat!" said Cass, viewing him with suspicion. "Quin Graham, have you had a drink?"

Quin hilariously declared his innocence. The draught of which he had so freely imbibed, though far more potent than any earthly brew, was one against which there are no prohibitory laws.

CHAPTER 2

THE fact that Cass had neglected to tell the family that he was bringing a friend home to supper did not in the least affect his welcome. It was not that the daily menu was of such a lavish nature that a guest or two made no difference; it was simply that the Martels belonged to that casual type which accepts any interruption to the regular order of things as a God-sent diversion.

In the present instance Rose had only to dispatch Edwin to the grocery for eggs and cheese, and send Myrna next door to borrow a chafing-dish, and, while these errands were being accomplished, to complete her own sketchy toilet. Rose was an impressionist when it came to dress. She got the desired effect with the least possible effort, as was evinced now by the way she was whirling two coils of chestnut hair, from which the tangles had not been removed, into round puffs over each ear. A dab of rouge on each cheek, a touch of red on the lips, a dash of powder over the whole, sleeves turned back, neck turned in, resulted in a poster effect that was quite satisfactory.

Of course the Martels had heard of Quinby

Graham: his name had loomed large in Cass's letters from France and later in his conversation; but this was the first time the hero was to be presented in person.

"What 's he like, Rose?" asked Myrna, arriving breathlessly with the chafing-dish. Myrna was twelve and seemed to labor under the constant apprehension that she was missing something, due no doubt to the fact that she was invariably dispatched on an errand when anything interesting was pending.

"Don't know," said Rose; "the hall was pitch-dark. He 's got a nice voice, though, and a dandy handshake."

"I bid to sit next to him at supper," said Myrna, hugging herself in ecstasy.

"You can if you promise not to take two helps of the Welsh rabbit."

Myrna refused to negotiate on any such drastic terms. "Are we going to have a fire in the sitting-room?" she asked.

"I don't know whether there is any more wood. Papa Claude promised to order some. You go see while I set the table. I 've a good notion to call over the fence and ask Fan Loomis to come to supper."

"Oh, Rose, *please* do!" cried Myrna. "I won't take but one help."

Cass, in the meanwhile, was making his guest at

home in the sitting-room by permitting him to be useful.

"You can light the lamp," he said, "while I make a fire."

Quin was willing to oblige, but the lamp was not. It put up a stubborn resistance to all efforts to coax it to do its duty.

"I bet it has n't been filled," said Cass; then, after the fashion of mankind, he lifted his voice in supplication to the nearest feminine ear:

"Oh! Ro—ose!"

His older sister, coming to the rescue, agreed with his diagnosis of the case, and with Quin's assistance bore the delinquent lamp to the kitchen.

"Hope you don't mind being made home-folks," she said, patting the puffs over her ears and looking at him sideways.

"Mind?" said Quin. "If you knew how good all this looks to me! It 's the first touch of home I 've had in years. Wish you 'd let me set the table —I 'm strong on K. P."

"Help yourself," said Rose; "the plates are in the pantry and the silver in the sideboard drawer. Wait a minute!"

She took a long apron from behind the door and handed it to him.

"How do these ends buckle up?" he asked, helplessly holding out the straps of the bib.

"They button around your little neck," she told him, smiling. "Turn round; I'll fix it."

"Why turn round?" said Quin.

Their eyes met in frank challenge.

"You silly boy!" she said—but she put her arms around his neck and fastened the bib just the same.

How that supper ever got itself cooked and served is a marvel. Everybody took a turn at the stirring and toasting, everybody contributed a missing article to the table, and there was much rushing from kitchen to dining-room, with many collisions and some upsets.

Quin was in the highest of spirits. Even Cass had never seen him quite like this. With his white apron over his uniform, he pranced about, dancing attendance on Rose, and keeping Myrna and Edwin in gales of laughter over his antics. Every now and then, however, his knees got wabbly and his breath came short, and by the time supper was prepared he was quite ready to sit down.

"What a shame Nell 's not here!" said Rose, breaking the eggs into the chafing-dish. "Then we could have charades. She 's simply great when she gets started."

"Who is Nell?" asked Quin.

"Eleanor Bartlett, our cousin. She 's like chicken and ice-cream—the rich Bartletts have her on week-days and we poor Martels get her only on Sundays. Has n't Cass ever told you about Nell?"

"Do you suppose I spend my time talking about my precious family?" growled Cass.

"No, but Nell 's different," said Rose; "she 's a sort of Solomon's baby—I mean the baby that Solomon had to decide about. Only in this case neither old Madam Bartlett nor Papa Claude will give up their half; they 'd see her dead first."

"You did tell me about her," said Quin to Cass, "one night when we were up in the Cantigny offensive. I remember the place exactly. Something about an orphan, and a lawsuit, and a little girl that was going to be an actress."

"That 's the dope," said Cass. "Only she 's not a kid any more. She grew up while I was in France. She 's a great girl, Nell is, when you get her away from that Bartlett mess!"

"Does anybody know where Papa Claude is?" Rose demanded, dexterously ladling out steaming Welsh rabbit on to slices of crisp brown toast.

"He is here, *mes enfants,* he is here!" cried a joyous voice from the hall, followed by a presence at once so exuberant and so impressive that Quin stared in amazement.

"This is Quinby Graham, grandfather," said Cass, by way of introduction.

The dressy old gentleman with the flowing white locks and the white rose in his buttonhole bore down upon Quin and enveloped his hand in both his own.

"I welcome you for Cassius' sake and for your

own!" he declared with such effusion that Quin was visibly embarrassed. "My grandson has told me of your long siege in the hospital, of your noble service to your country, of your gallant conduct at——"

"Sit down, Papa Claude, and finish your oration after supper," cried Rose; "the rabbit won't wait on anybody."

Thus cut short, Mr. Martel took his seat and, nothing daunted, helped himself bountifully to everything within reach.

"I am a gourmet, Sergeant Graham, but not a gourmand. Edwin Booth used to say——"

"Sir?" answered Edwin Booth's namesake from the kitchen, where he had been dispatched for more bread.

"No, no, my son, I was referring to——"

But Papa Claude, as usual, did not get to finish the sentence. The advent of the next-door neighbor, who had been invited and then forgotten, caused great amusement owing to the fact that there was no more supper left.

"Give her some bread and jam, Myrna," said Rose; "and if the jam is out, bring the brown sugar. You don't mind, do you, Fan?"

Fan, an amiable blonde person who was going to be fat at forty, declared that she did n't want a thing to eat, honestly she did n't, and that besides she adored bread and brown sugar.

"We won't stop to wash up," said Rose; "Myrna

will have loads of time to do it in the morning, because she does n't have to go to school. We 'll just clear the table and let the dishes stand."

"We are incorrigible Bohemians, as you observe," said Mr. Martel to Quin, with a deprecating arching of his fine brows. "We lay too little stress, I fear, on the conventions. But the exigencies of the dramatic profession—of which, you doubtless know, I have been a member for the past forty years——"

"Take him in the sitting-room, Mr. Graham," urged Rose; "I 'll bring your coffee in there."

Without apparently being conscious of the fact, Mr. Martel, still discoursing in rounded periods, was transferred to the big chair beside the lamp, while Quin took up his stand on the hearth-rug and looked about him.

Such a jumble of a room as it was! Odds and ends of furniture, the survival of various household wrecks; chipped bric-à-brac; a rug from which the pattern had long ago vanished; an old couch piled with shabby cushions; a piano with scattered music sheets. On the walls, from ceiling to foot-board, hung faded photographs of actors and actresses, most of them with bold inscriptions dashed across their corners in which the donors invariably expressed their friendship, affection, or if the chirography was feminine their devoted love, for "dear Claude Martel." Over the mantel was a portrait of dear Claude himself, taken in the rôle of Mark

Antony, and making rather a good job of it, on the whole, with his fine Roman profile and massive brow.

It was all shabby and dusty and untidy; but to Quinby Graham, standing on the hearth-rug and trying to handle his small coffee-cup as if he were used to it, the room was completely satisfying. There was a cozy warmth and mellowness about it, a kindly atmosphere of fellowship, a sense of intimate human relations, that brought a lump into his throat. He had almost forgotten that things could be like this!

So absorbed was he in his surroundings, and in the imposing old actor encompassed by the galaxy of pictured notables, that he lost the thread of Mr. Martel's discourse until he heard him asking:

"What is the present? A clamor of the senses, a roar that deafens us to the music of life. I dwell in the past and in the future, Sergeant Graham—the dear reminiscent past and the glorious unborn future. And that reminds me that Cassius tells me that you are both about to receive your discharge from the army and are ready for the next great adventure. May I ask what yours is to be? A return, perhaps, to your native city?"

"My native city happens to be a river," said Quin. "I was born on a house-boat going up the Yangtse-Kiang."

"Indeed!" cried Mr. Martel with interest. "What a romantic beginning! And your family?"

"Have n't got any. You see, sir," said Quin, expanding under the flattering attention of his host, "my people were all missionaries. Most of them died off before I was fourteen, and I was shipped back to America to go to school. I did n't hold out very long, though. After two years in high school I ran away and joined the navy."

"And since then you have been a soldier of fortune, eh? No cares, no responsibilities. Free to roam the wide world in search of adventure."

Quin studied the end of his cigarette.

"That ain't so good as it sounds," he said. "Sometimes I think I 'd amounted to more if I had somebody that belonged to me."

"Is n't it rather early in the season for a young man's fancy to be lightly turning——"

The quotation was lost upon Quin, but the twinkle in the speaker's expressive eye was not.

"I did n't mean that," he laughingly protested; "I mean a mother or a sister or somebody like that, who would be a kind of anchor. Take Cass, for instance; he 's steady as a rock."

"Ah! Cassius! One in ten thousand. From the time he was twelve he has shared with me the financial burden. An artist, Sergeant Graham, must remain aloof from the market-place. Now that I have retired permanently from the stage in order

to devote my time exclusively to writing, my only business engagement is a series of lectures at the university, where, as you know, I occupy the chair of Dramatic Literature."

The chair thus euphemistically referred to was scarcely more than a three-legged stool, which he occupied four mornings in the week, the rest of his time being spent at home in the arduous task of writing tragedies in blank verse.

"What I got to think about is a job," said Quin, much more interested in his own affairs than in those of his host.

"Commercial or professional?" inquired Mr. Martel.

"Oh, I can turn my hand to 'most anything," bragged Quin, blowing smoke-rings at the ceiling. "It 's experience that counts, and, believe me, I 've had a plenty."

"Experience plus education," added Mr. Martel; "we must not underestimate the advantages of education."

"That 's where I 'm short," admitted Quin. "My folks were all smart enough. Guess if they had lived I 'd been put through college and all the rest of it. My grandfather was Dr. Ezra Quinby. Ever hear of him?"

Mr. Martel had to acknowledge that he had not.

"Guess he is better known in China than in

America," said Quin. "He died before I was born."

"And you have no people in America?"

"No people anywhere," said Quin cheerfully; "but I got a lot of friends scattered around over the world, and a bull-dog and a couple of cats up at a lumber-camp near Portland."

"Cassius tells me that you are thinking of returning to Maine."

Quin ran his fingers through his hair and laughed. "That was yesterday," he said. "To-day you couldn't get me out of Kentucky with a machine-gun!"

Claude Martel rose and laid an affectionate hand on his shoulder. "Then, my boy, we claim you as our own. Cassius' home is your home, his family your family, his——"

The address of welcome was cut short by Cass's arrival with an armful of wood which he deposited on the hearth, and a moment later the girls, followed by Edwin, came trooping in from the kitchen.

"Let 's make a circle round the fire and sing the old year out," suggested Rose gaily. "Myrna, get the banjo and the guitar. Shall I play on the piano, Papa Claude, or will you?"

Mr. Martel, expressing the noble sentiment that age should always be an accompaniment to youth, took his place at the piano and, with a pose worthy of Rubinstein, struck a few preliminary chords,

while the group about the fire noisily settled itself for the evening.

"You can put your head against my knees, if you like," Rose said to Quin, who was sprawling on the floor at her feet. "There, is that comfy?"

"I 'll say it 's all right!" said Quin with heartfelt satisfaction.

There was something free and easy and gipsy-like about the evening, a sort of fireside picnic that brought June dreams in January. As the hours wore on, the singing, which had been noisy and rollicking, gradually mellowed into sentiment, a sentiment that found vent in dreamy eyes and long-drawn-out choruses, with a languorous over-accentuation of the sentimental passages. One by one, the singers fell under the spell of the music and the firelight. Cass and Fan Loomis sat shoulder to shoulder on the broken-springed couch and gazed with blissful oblivion into the red embers on the hearth. Rose, whose voice led all the rest, surreptitiously wiped her eyes when no one was looking; Edwin and Myrna, solemnly plucking their banjo and guitar, were lost in moods of dormant emotion; while Papa Claude at the piano let his dim eyes range the pictured walls, while his memory traveled back through the years on many a secret tryst of its own.

But it was the lank Sergeant with the big feet, and the hair that stood up where it should n't, who

dared to dream the most preposterous dream of them all. For, as he sang there in the firelight, a little god was busy lighting the tapers in the most sacred shrines of his being, until he felt like a cathedral at high mass with all the chimes going.

"There 's a long, long trail a-winding
Into the land of my dreams,
Where the nightingales are singing
And a white moon beams."

How many times he had sung it in France!—jolting along muddy, endless roads, heartsick, homesick.

"There 's a long, long night of waiting
Until my dreams all come true,
Till the day when I 'll be going
Down that long, long trail with you."

What had "you" meant to him then? A girl—a pretty girl, of course; but *any* girl. And now?

Ah, now he knew what he had been going toward, not only on those terrible roads in France, but all through the years of his life. An exquisite, imperious little officer's girl with divinely compassionate eyes, who was n't ashamed to dance with a private, and who had let him hold her hand at parting while she said in accents an angel might have envied, "Good-by, Soldier Boy."

Quin sighed profoundly and slipped his arm under his head, and at the same moment the owner of the knee upon which he was leaning also heaved a sigh and shifted *her* position, and somehow in the

adjustment two lonely hands came in contact and evidently decided that, after all, substitutes were *some* comfort.

It was not until all the whistles in town had announced the birth of the New Year that the party broke up, and it was not until then that Quin realized that he was very tired, and that his pulse was behaving in a way that was, alas, all too familiar.

CHAPTER 3

FRIDAY after New Year's found Sergeant Graham again flat on his back at the Base Hospital, facing sentence of three additional weeks in bed. In vain had he risked a reprimand by hotly protesting the point with the Captain; in vain had he declared to the nurse that he would rather live on his feet than die on his back. Judgment was passed, and he lay with an ice-bag on his head and a thermometer in his mouth and hot rage in his heart.

What made matters worse was that Cass Martel had come over from the Convalescent Barracks only that morning to announce that he had received his discharge and was going home. To Quin it seemed that everybody but himself was going home—that is, everybody but the incurables. At that thought a dozen nameless fears that had been tormenting him of late all seemed to get together and rush upon him. What if the doctors were holding him on from month to month, experimenting, promising, disappointing, only in the end to bunch him with the permanently disabled and ship him off to some God-

forsaken spot to spend the rest of his life in a hospital?

He gripped his hands over his chest and gave himself up to savage rebellion. If they would let him alone he might get well! In France it had been his head. Whenever the wound began to heal and things looked a bit cheerful, some saw-bones had come along and thumped and probed and X-rayed, and then it had been ether and an operation and the whole blooming thing over again. Then, when they could n't work on his head any longer, they 'd started up this talk about his heart. Of course his heart was jumpy! All the fellows who had been badly gassed had jumpy hearts. But how was he ever going to get any better lying there on his back? What he needed was exercise and decent food and something cheerful to think about. He wanted desperately to get away from his memories, to forget the horrors, the sickening sights and smells, the turmoil and confusion of the past two years. In spite of his most heroic efforts, he kept living over past events. This time last year he had been up in the Toul sector, where half the men he knew had gone west. It was up there old Corpy had got his head shot off . . .

He resolutely fixed his attention on a spider that was swinging directly over his head and tried to forget old Corpy. He thought instead of Captain Phipps, but the thought did not calm him. What

sense was there in his ordering more of this fool rest business? Well, he told himself fiercely, he was n't going to stand for it! The war was over, he had done his part, he was going to demand his freedom. Discipline or no discipline, he would go over Phipps' head and appeal to the Colonel.

Throwing aside the ice-bag, he looked around for his uniform. But the nurse had evidently mistrusted the look in his eyes when she gave him the Captain's orders, for the hook over his bed was empty. He raised himself in his cot and glared savagely down the ward, sniffing the air suspiciously. Two orderlies were wheeling No. 17 back from the operating-room, and Quin already caught the faint odor of ether. The first whiff of it filled him with loathing.

Thrusting his bare feet into slippers and his arms into a shabby old bath-robe, he flung himself out of bed and slipped out on the porch. The air was cold and bracing and gloriously free from the hospital combination of wienerwürst, ether, and dried peaches that had come to be a nightmare odor to him. He sat on the railing and drew in deep, refreshing breaths, and as he did so things began to right themselves. Fair play to Quin amounted almost to a religion, and it was suddenly borne in upon him that he would not be where he was had he observed the rules of the game. But then again, if he had not danced, he never would have——

At that moment something so strange happened that he put a hot hand to a hotter brow and wondered if he was delirious. The singularly vibrant voice that had been echoing in his memory since New Year's eve was saying directly behind him:

"I shall give them all the chocolate they want, Captain Harold Phipps, and you may court-martial me later if you like!"

Quin glanced up hastily, and there, framed in the doorway, in a Red Cross uniform, stood his dream girl, looking so much more ravishing than she had before that he promptly snatched the blue and gray vision from its place of honor and installed a red, white, and blue one instead. So engrossed was he in the apparition that he quite failed to see Captain Phipps surveying him over her shoulder.

"Number 7!" said the Captain with icy decision, "were n't you instructed to stay in bed?"

"I was, sir," said Quin, coming to attention and presenting a decidedly sorry aspect.

"Go back at once, and add three days to the time indicated. This way, Miss Bartlett."

Now, it is well-nigh impossible to preserve one's dignity when suffering a reprimand in public; but when you are handicapped by a shabby bath-robe, a three days' growth of beard, and a grouch that gives you the expression of a bandit, and the public happens to be the one being on earth whom you

are most anxious to please, the situation becomes tragic.

Quin set his jaw and shuffled ignominiously off to bed, thankful for once that he had been considered unworthy a second glance from those luminous brown eyes. His satisfaction, however, was short-lived. A moment later the young lady appeared at the far end of the ward, carrying an absurd little basket adorned with a large pink bow, from which she began to distribute chocolates.

A feminine presence in the ward always created a flutter, but the previous flutters were mere zephyrs compassed to the cyclone produced by the new ward visitor. Some one started the phonograph, and Michaelis, who had been swearing all day that he would never be able to walk again, actually began to dance. Witticisms were exchanged from bed to bed, and the man who was going to be operated on next morning flung a pillow at an orderly and upset a vase of flowers. Things had not been so cheerful for weeks.

Quin, lying in the last bed in the ward, alternated between rapture and despair as he watched the progress of the visitor. Would she recognize him? Would she speak to him if she did, when he looked like that? Perhaps if he turned his face to the wall and pretended to be asleep she would pass him by. But he did not want her to pass him by. This might

be the only chance he would ever have to see her again!

Back in his fringe of consciousness he was frantically groping for the name the Captain had mentioned: Barnet? Barret? Bartlett? That was it! And with the recovery of the name Quin's mind did another somersault. Bartlett? Where had he heard that name? Eleanor Bartlett? Some nonsense about "Solomon's baby." Why, Rose Martel, of course.

Then all thought deserted him, for the world suddenly shrank to five feet two of femininity, and he heard a gay, impersonal voice saying:

"May I put a cake of chocolate on your table?"

For the life of him, he could not answer. He only lay there with his mouth open, looking at her, while she straightened the contents of her basket. One more moment and she would be gone. Quin staked all on a chance shot.

"Thank you, Miss Eleanor Bartlett," he said, with that ridiculous blush that was so out of keeping with his audacity.

She looked at him in amazement; then her face broke into a smile of recognition.

"Well, bless my soul, if it isn't Sergeant Slim! What are you doing here?"

"Same thing I been doing for six months," said Quin sheepishly; "counting the planks in the ceiling."

"But I thought you had got well. Oh, I hope it was n't the dancing——"

"Lord, no," said Quin, keeping his hand over his bristly chin. "I 'm husky, all right. Only they 've got so used to seeing me laying around that they can't bear to let me go."

"Do you have to lie flat on your back like that, with no pillow or anything?"

"It ain't so bad, except at mess-time."

"And you can't even sit up to eat?"

"Not supposed to."

Miss Bartlett eyed him compassionately.

"I am coming out twice a week now—Mondays and Fridays—and I 'm going to bring you something nice every time I come. How long will you be here?"

"Three weeks," said Quin—adding, with a funny twist of his lip, "three weeks and three days."

"Oh! Were you the boy on the porch? How funny I did n't recognize you! I 'm going to ask Captain Phipps to let you off those extra days."

"No, you must n't," Quin objected earnestly; "I 'll take what 's coming to me. Besides," he added, "one of those days might be a Monday or a Friday!"

This seemed to amuse her, for she smiled as she wrote his name and bed number in a small notebook, with the added entry: "Oyster soup, cigarettes, and a razor."

Just as she was leaving, she remembered something and turned back.

"How did you know my name?" she asked with lively curiosity.

"Did n't the Captain call it on the porch?"

"Did he? But not my first name. How on earth *did* you know that?"

"Perhaps I guessed it," Quin said, looking mysterious. And just then a nurse came along and thrust the thermometer back in his mouth, and the conversation was abruptly ended.

Of course the calendar must have been right about the three weeks that followed; there probably were seven days in each week and twenty-four hours in each day. But Quin was n't sure about it. He knew beyond doubt that there were three Mondays and four Fridays and one wholly gratuitous and never-to-be-forgotten Sunday when Miss Bartlett brought his dinner from town, and insisted upon cutting his chicken for him and feeding him custard with a spoon. The rest of the days were lost in abstract time, during which Quin had his hair cut and his face shaved, and did bead-work.

Until now he had sturdily refused to be inveigled into occupational therapy. Those guys that were done for could learn to knit, he said, and to make silly little mats, and weave things on a loom. If he could n't do a man's work he 'd be darned if he was going to do a woman's. But now all was changed.

He announced his intention of making the classiest bead chain that had ever been achieved in 2 C. He insisted upon the instructor getting him the most expensive beads in the market, regardless of size or color.

Now, for Quin, with his big hands and lack of dexterity, to have worked with beads under the most favorable conditions would have been difficult, but to master the art lying flat on his back was a *tour de force.* He pricked his fingers and broke his thread; he upset the beads on the floor, on the bed, in his tray; he took out and put in with infinite patience, "each bead a thought, each thought a prayer."

"Don't you think you had better give it up?" asked the instructor, in despair, after the fourth lesson.

"You don't know me," said Quin, setting his jaw. "You been trying to get me into this for two weeks —now you 've got to see me through."

It did not take long for the other patients to discover Quin's state of mind.

"How about your heart disease, Graham?" they inquired daily; "think it 's going to be chronic?"

But Quin had little time for them. The distinction he had enjoyed as the champion poker-player in 2 C. began to wane as his popularity with the new ward visitor increased.

"I like your nerve!—keeping her up there at your bed all the time," complained Michaelis.

"She 's an old friend of mine," Quin threw off nonchalantly.

"Aw, what you tryin' to put over on us?" scoffed Mike. "Where 'd you ever git to know a girl like that?"

"Well, I know her all right," said Quin.

The little mystery about Miss Bartlett's first name had been a fruitful topic of conversation between a couple whose topics were necessarily limited. She had teased Quin to tell her how he knew, and also how he knew she wanted to go on the stage; and Quin had teased back; and at last it had resolved itself into a pretty contest of wits.

This served to keep her beside him often as long as four minutes. Then he would gain an additional two minutes by showing her what progress he had made with his chain, and consulting her preference for an American flag or a Red Cross worked in the medallion.

When every other means of detaining her had been exhausted, he sometimes resorted to strategy. Constitutionally he was opposed to duplicity; he was built on certain square lines that disqualified him for many a comfortable round hole in life. But under the stress of present circumstances he persuaded himself that the end justified the means. Ignoring the fact that he was as devoid of relations

as a tree is of leaves in December, he developed a sudden sense of obligation to an imaginary cousin whom he added, without legal authority, to the population of Peru, Indiana. By means of Miss Bartlett's white hand he frequently informed her that she was not to worry about him, because he was "doing splendid," and that a hospital "was n't so worse when you get used to it." And while he dictated words of assurance to his "Cousin Sue" his eyes feasted upon a dainty profile with long brown lashes that swept a peach-blow cheek. Once he became so demoralized by this too pleasing prospect that he said "tell him" instead of "tell her," and the lashes lifted in instant inquiry.

"I mean—er—her husband," Quin gasped.

"But you had me direct the other letters to Miss Sue Brown."

"Yes, I know," said Quin, with an embarrassment that might have been attributed to skeletons in family closets; "but, you see—she—er—she took back her own name."

The one cloud that darkened Quin's horizon these days was Captain Phipps. His visits to the ward always coincided with Miss Bartlett's, and he seemed to take a spiteful pleasure in keeping the men at attention while he engaged her in intimate conversation. He was an extremely fastidious, well groomed young man, with an insolent hauteur and a certain lordly air of possession that proclaimed him a con-

queror of the sex. Quin regarded him with growing disfavor.

When the three weeks were almost over, Quin was allowed to sit up, and even to walk on the porch. Miss Bartlett found him there one day when she arrived.

"Aha!" she cried, "I 've found you out, Sergeant Slim! You are Cass Martel's hero, and that's where you heard about me and found out my first name."

Quin pleaded guilty, and their usual five minutes together lengthened into fifteen while she gave him all the news of the Martel family. Cass had taken his old position at the railroad office, and, dear knows, it was a good thing! And Rose was giving dancing lessons. And what did he think little old Myrna had done? Adopted a baby! Yes, a baby; was n't it too ridiculous! An Italian one that the washwoman had forsaken. And Papa Claude had given up his lectures at the university in order to write the great American play. Were n't they the funniest and the dearest people he had ever known?

It was amazing how intimate Quin and Miss Bartlett got on the subject of the Martels. He had to tell her in detail just what a brick her cousin Cass was, and she had to tell him what a really wonderful actor Papa Claude used to be.

"Captain Phipps says he knows more about the stage than any man in the country."

"What does the Captain know about it?" asked Quin.

"Captain Phipps? Why, he 's a playwright. He means to devote all his time to the stage as soon as he gets out of the army. You may not believe it, but he is an even better dramatist than he is a doctor."

"Oh, yes, I do," said Quin; "that 's easy to believe."

The sarcasm was lost upon Miss Bartlett, who was intent upon delivering her message from the Martels. They had sent word that they expected Quin to come straight to them when he got his discharge, and that his room was waiting for him.

"And you?" asked Quin eagerly. "You 'll be there every Sunday?"

Her face, which had been all smiles, underwent a sudden change. She said with something perilously like a pout:

"No, I sha n't; I 'm to be shipped off to school next week."

"School?" repeated Quin incredulously. "What do you want to be going back to school for?"

"I *don't* want to. I hate it. It 's the price I am paying for that dance I had with you at the Hawaiian Garden—that and other things."

"What do you mean?"

"Some old tabby of a chaperon saw me there and came and told my grandmother."

"But what could she have told? You did n't do anything you ought n't to."

Miss Bartlett shook her head. It was evidently something she could not explain, for she sat staring gloomily at the wall above the bed, then she said abruptly: "Well, I must be going. Good-by if I don't see you again!"

"But you will," announced Quin fiercely. "You are going to see me next Sunday at the Martels'. I 'll be there if I land in the guard-house for it."

"Why, your time 's up Saturday, is n't it? Oh! I forgot those three extra days. Captain Phipps has got to let you off. He will if I tell him to."

At this something quite unexpected and elemental surged up in Quin. He forgot the amenities that he had taken such pains to observe in Miss Bartlett's presence, he entirely lost sight of the social gap that lay between them, and blurted out with deadly earnestness:

"Say, are you his girl?"

This had the effect of bringing Miss Bartlett promptly to her feet, and the next instant poor Quin was saying in an agony of regret:

"I 'm sorry, Miss Bartlett. I did n't mean to be nervy. Honest, I did n't. Wait a minute—*please*——"

But she was gone, leaving him to spend the rest of the afternoon searching for a phrase sufficiently odious to express his own opinion of himself.

CHAPTER 4

ELEANOR BARTLETT, speeding home from the hospital with Captain Phipps beside her, repeated Quin's question to herself more than once. Up to the present her loves, like her friendships, had been entirely episodic. She had gone easily from one affair to another not so much from fickleness as from growth. What she wanted on Monday did not seem in the least desirable on Saturday, and it was a new and disturbing sensation to have the same person dominating her thoughts for so many consecutive days. If her relations with the young officer from Chicago were as platonic as she would have herself and her family believe, why had she allowed the affair to arrive at a stage that precipitated her banishment? Why was she even now flying in the face of authority and risking a serious reprimand by letting him ride in her car?

In fierce justification she told herself it was simply because the family had meddled. If they had not interfered, things would never have reached the danger mark. She had met Captain Phipps three weeks ago at her Uncle Randolph Bartlett's, and had at first not been sure that she liked him. He had

seemed then a little superior and condescending, and had evidently considered her too young to be interesting. But the next time they met there Aunt Flo had made her do the balcony scene from "Romeo and Juliet," and since then all had been different.

Captain Phipps had not only monopolized her at the dances—he had also found time from his not over-arduous military duties to drop in on her frequently in the afternoons. For hours at a time they had sat in the long, dim Bartlett parlor, with only the ghostly bust of old Madam Bartlett for a chaperon, ostensibly absorbed in the study of modern drama, but finding ample time to dwell at length upon Eleanor's qualifications for the stage and the Captain's budding genius as a playwright. And just when Ibsen and Pinero were giving place to Sudermann, and vague personal ambitions were crystallizing into definite plans, the family interfered.

The causes of their condemnation were as varied as they were numerous. He was ten years older than Eleanor; he was too sophisticated a companion for a young girl; he had taken her to a public dance-hall on New Year's eve, where she had been seen dancing with an unknown private; he had been quite insolent to Madam when she had taken him to task for it; and, most heinous of all, he was encouraging her in her ambition to go on the stage.

And beneath it all, Eleanor knew quite well, was the nervous flutter of apprehension that seized the entire family whenever a threatening masculine presence loomed on the horizon.

She stole a glance at her handsome companion, and, seeing that he was observing her, quickly lowered her eyes. The Captain had a flattering way of studying her poses, remarking on the lines of her gowns and her hats. He was constantly discovering interesting things about her that she had not known before. But sometimes, as now, she was restive under his too close scrutiny.

"So you are actually going to leave me next week?" he asked, with a note of personal aggrievement.

"To leave you? I like that! If it were n't for you I should n't be going."

"Are they really sending you away on my account?"

"Indeed they are. Grandmother says you are encouraging me about the stage, and that poor Papa Claude is demoralizing us both."

"Is n't that absurd?" said the Captain. "Dear old C. M. is about as innocuous as a peacock. Madam Bartlett should have been born in the seventeenth century. What will she say when she sees your name blazing over a Broadway theater?"

"In one of your plays! Oh, Captain, would n't that be glorious?"

"Have n't I asked you to drop the 'Captain'? My name is Harold. Say it!"

"No; I can't."

"Yes, you can. Come!"

But she defied him with tightly closed lips and dancing eyes. With feminine instinct she had discovered that the irresistible Captain was piqued and stimulated by the unusual taste of opposition.

"You little minx!" he said, lifting an accusing finger. "Those eyes of yours are going to do a lot of damage before they get through with it."

Eleanor took kindly to the thought that she was dangerous. If she could cause disturbance to an individual by the guarded flutter of her eyelids, what effect might she not produce by giving them full play before a larger audience?

"Do you really think I could act if I got the chance?" she asked dreamily.

"I am absolutely sure. Your grandfather 's quite right when he says you were born to the footlights. With your voice and your unusual coloring and your plastic little body——"

"But you can't imagine the opposition," Eleanor broke in. "It is n't as if my mother and father were living. I believe they would understand. But grandfather and the aunties, and even Uncle Ranny, throw a fit at the mere mention of the stage."

"You do not belong to them," said the Captain impatiently. "You do not even belong to yourself.

A great talent belongs to the world. All these questions will settle themselves, once you take the definite step."

"And you actually believe that I will get to New York to study?"

"I don't believe—I *know*. I intend to make it my business to see that you do."

There was a confident ring of masterful assurance in his voice that carried delicious conviction. A person who was so absolutely sure of himself made other people sure of him, too, for the moment.

Eleanor, sitting low in the car, with her absent eyes fixed on the road ahead, lapsed into a day-dream. From an absorbed contemplation of herself and her dramatic career, her mind veered in gratitude to the one who most believed in its possibility. What a friend he had been! Just when she had been ready to give up in despair, he had fanned her dying hope into a glorious blaze that illuminated every waking hour. And it was not only his sympathetic interest in her thwarted ambition that touched her: it was also the fact that he had rescued her from the daily boredom of sitting with elderly ladies making interminable surgical dressings, and by an adroit bit of diplomacy outwitted the family and introduced her as a ward visitor at the camp hospital.

The mere thought of the hospital sent her mind flying off at a tangent. Even the stage gave way for the moment to this new and all-absorbing occu-

pation. Never in her life had she done anything so interesting. The escape from home, the personal contact with all those nice, jolly boys, the excitement of being of service for the first time in her butterfly existence, was intoxicating. She smiled now as she thought of the way Graham's eager head always popped up the moment she entered the door, and of how his face shone when she talked to him. After all, she told herself, there *was* something thrilling in having hands that had captured a machine-gun laboriously threading tiny beads for her, in having a soldier who had been decorated for courage stammer and blush in her presence.

"Well," said the Captain, who had been lazily observing her, "are n't you about through with your mental monologue?"

Eleanor roused herself with a start.

"Oh, I am sorry! I was thinking about my boys at the hospital. You can't imagine how I hate to leave them!"

The answer was evidently not what the Captain had expected. As long as his company of feminine admirers marched in adoring unison he was indifferent to their existence; but let one miss step and he was instantly on the alert.

"I have n't noticed any tears being shed over leaving me," he said, and the aggrieved note in his voice promptly stirred her humor.

"Why should I mind leaving you? You don't need me."

"How do you know?"

She looked at him scoffingly.

"You don't need anything or anybody. You've got all you want in yourself."

"I'll show you what I want!" he said, and, quickly bending toward her, he kissed her on the cheek.

It was the merest brush of his lips, but it brought the color flaming into her face and the lightning into her eyes. She had never been so angry in her life, and it seemed to her an age that she sat there rigid and indignant, suffocated by his nearness but powerless to move away. Then she got the car stopped, and announced with great dignity that she was nearly home and that she would have to ask him to get out.

Captain Phipps lazily descended from the car, then stood with elbows on the ledge of the door and rolled a cigarette with great deliberation. Eleanor, in spite of her wrath, could not help admiring the graceful, conscious movement of his slender hands with their highly polished nails. It was not until he had struck his match that he looked at her and smiled quizzically.

"What a dear little goose you are! Do you suppose that stage lovers are going to stand in the wings and throw kisses to you?"

"No," said Eleanor hotly; "but that will be different."

"It certainly will," he agreed amiably. "You will not only have to be kissed, but you will have to kiss back. You have a lot of little puritanical prejudices to get over, my dear, before you can ever hope to act. You don't want to be a thin-blooded little old maid, do you?"

The shot was well aimed, for Eleanor had no desire to follow in the arid footsteps of her two spinster aunts. She looked at Captain Phipps unsteadily and shook her head.

"Of course you don't," he encouraged her. "You are n't built for it. Besides, it 's an actress's business to cultivate her emotions rather than repress them, is n't it?"

"Yes, I suppose it is."

"Then, for heaven's sake, obey your impulses and let other people obey theirs. From now on you are to be identified with a profession that transcends the petty conventions of society. Confess! Are n't you already a little ashamed of getting angry with me just now?"

She was not ashamed, not in the least; but her ardent desire to prove her fitness for that coveted profession, together with the compelling insistence of that persuasive voice, prompted her to hold out a reluctant hand and to smile.

"You are a darling child!" said Captain Phipps,

with a level glance of approval. "I shall see you to-morrow. When? Where?"

But she would make no engagement. She was in a flutter to be gone. It was her first experience at dancing on a precipice, and, while she liked it, she could not deny, even to herself, that at times it made her uncomfortably hot and dizzy.

CHAPTER 5

ELEANOR'S thoughts were still in a turmoil as she slowed her car to a within-the-law limit of speed and brought it to a dignified halt before an imposing edifice on Third Avenue. The precaution was well taken, for a long, pale face that had been pressed to a front window promptly transferred itself to the front door, and an anxious voice called out:

"Oh, Nellie, *why* did you stay out so late? Did n't you know it was your duty to be in before five?"

"It 's not late, Aunt Isobel," said Eleanor impatiently. "It gets dark early, that 's all."

"And you must be frozen," persisted Miss Isobel, "with those thin pumps and silk stockings, and nothing but that veil on your head."

"But I 'm *hot!*" declared Eleanor, throwing open her coat. "The house is stifling. Can't we have a window open?"

Miss Isobel sighed. Like the rest of the family, she never knew what to expect from this troublesome, adorable, disturbing mystery called Eleanor. She worshiped her with the solicitous, over-anxious care that saw fever in the healthy flush of youth,

regarded a sneeze as premonitory of consumption, and waited with dark certitude for the "something dreadful" that instinct told her was ever about to happen to her darling.

"I am afraid your grandmother is terribly upset about your staying out so late," she said, with a note of warning in her voice.

"What made you tell her?" demanded Eleanor.

"Because she asked me, and of course I could not deceive her. I don't believe you know how hard it is to keep things from her."

"*Don't* I!" said Eleanor, with the tolerant smile of a professional for an amateur. "Well, a few minutes more won't make any difference. I 'll go and change my dress."

"No, dear; you must go to her first. She 's been sending Hannah down every few minutes to see if you were here."

"Oh, dear! I suppose I 'm in for it!" sighed Eleanor, flinging her coat across the banister. Then, in answer to a plaintive voice from the library, "Yes, Aunt Enid?"

"Why on earth are you so late, sweetheart? Did n't you know your grandmother would be fretted?"

The possessor of the plaintive voice emerged from the library, trailing an Oriental scarf as she came. Like her elder sister, she was tall and thin, but she did not wear Miss Isobel's look of mar-

tyred resignation. On the contrary, she had the starved look of one who is constantly trying to pick up the crumbs of interest that other people let fall.

Enid Bartlett might have passed for a pretty woman had her appearance not been permanently affected by an artist once telling her she looked like a Botticelli. Since that time she had done queer things to her hair, pursed her lips, and cultivated an expression of chronic yearning.

"I have n't seen you since breakfast, Nellie," she said gently. "Have n't you a kiss for me?"

Eleanor presented a perfunctory cheek over the banisters, taking care that it was not the one that had been kissed a few minutes before.

"Remember your promise," Aunt Enid whispered; "don't forget that your grandmother is an old lady and you must not excite her."

"But she excites me," said Eleanor doggedly. "She makes me want to smash windows and scream."

"Why, Nellie!" Miss Enid's mournful eyes filled with tears. Instantly Eleanor was all contrition.

"I 'm sorry!" she said, with a real kiss this time. "I 'll behave. Give you my word I will!" And, with an affectionate squeeze of the hand that clasped hers, she ran up the steps.

The upper hall, like the rest of the house, was pervaded by an air of gloomy grandeur. Everything was dreary, formal, fixed. Not an ornament

or a picture had been changed since Eleanor could remember. She was the only young thing about the place, and it always seemed to her as if the house and its occupants were conspiring to make her old and staid and stupid, like themselves.

At the door of her grandmother's room she paused. As far back as she could remember, her quarrels with her grandmother had been the most terrifying events of her life. Repetition never robbed them of their horror, and no amount of spoiling between times could make up to her for the violence of the moment. It took all the courage she had to turn the knob of the door and enter.

A brigadier-general planning an important campaign would have presented no more commanding presence than did the formidable old lady who sat at a flat-top desk, issuing orders in a loud, decisive tone to a small meek-looking man who stood before her. The most arresting feature about Madam Bartlett was a towering white pompadour that began where most pompadours end, and soared to a surprising height above her large, handsome, masculine face. The fact that her hair line had gradually receded from her forehead to the top of her head affected no change whatever in the arrangement of her coiffure. Neither in regard to her hair nor to her figure had she yielded one iota to the whims of Nature. Her body was still confined in the stiffest of stays, and in spite of her seventy years

was as straight as an arrow. At Eleanor's entrance she motioned her peremptorily to a chair and proceeded with the business in hand.

"You go back and tell Mr. Bangs," she was saying to the meek-looking person, "that I want him to send somebody up here who knows more than you do. Do you understand?"

The meek one evidently understood, for he reached nervously for his cap.

"Wait!" commanded Madam peremptorily. "Don't start off like that, while I am talking to you! Tell Mr. Bangs this is the third time I've asked him to send me the report of Bartlett & Bangs' export business for the past year. I want it immediately. I am not in my dotage yet. I still have some say-so in the firm. Well, what are you waiting for?"

"I was waiting to know if there was anything more, ma'am."

"If there had been I would have said so. Tell Hannah to come in as you go out."

Eleanor looked at her grandmother expectantly, but there was no answering glance. The old lady was evidently in one of her truculent moods that brooked no interference.

"Has the plumber come?" she demanded of the elderly colored maid who appeared at the door.

"No, ma'am. He can't get here till to-morrow."

"Tell him I won't wait. If he can't come within

an hour he need n't come at all. Where is Tom?"

Hannah's eyes shifted uneasily. "Tom? Why, Tom, he thought you discharged him."

"So I did. But he 's not to go until I get another butler. Send him up here at once."

"But he ain't here," persisted Hannah fearfully. "He 's went for good this time."

Eleanor, sitting demurely by the door, had a moment of unholy exultation. Old black Tom, the butler, had been Madam's chief domestic prop for a quarter of a century. He had been the patient buffer between her and the other servants, taking her domineering with unfailing meekness, and even venturing her defense when mutiny threatened below stairs. "You-all don't understand old Miss," he would say loyally. "She 's all right, only she 's jes' nachully mean, dat 's all."

In the turning of this humble worm, Eleanor felt in some vague way a justification of her own rebellion.

His departure, however, did not tend to clear the domestic atmosphere. By the time Madam had settled the plumbing question and expressed her opinion of Tom and all his race, she was in no mood to deal leniently with the shortcomings of a headstrong young granddaughter.

"Well," she said, addressing her at last, "why did n't you make it midnight?"

"It 's only a little after five." Eleanor knew she

was putting up a feeble defense, and her hands grew cold.

"It is nearly six, and it is dark. Could n't you have withdrawn the sunshine of your presence from the hospital half an hour sooner?"

Under her sharp glance there was a curious protective tenderness, the savage concern of a lioness for her whelp; but Eleanor saw only the scoffing expression in the keen eyes, and heard the note of irony in all she said.

"Your going out to the hospital is all foolishness, anyhow," the old lady continued, sorting her papers with efficiency. "Contagious diseases, germs, and what not. But some women would be willing to go to Hades if they could tie a becoming rag around their heads. Why did n't you dress yourself properly before you came in here?"

"I wanted to, but Aunt——"

"Aunt Enid, I suppose! If it was left to her she 'd have you trailing around in a Greek tunic and sandals, with a laurel wreath on your head."

There was an ominous pause, during which Madam's wrinkled, bony hands, flashing with diamonds, searched rapidly among the papers.

"You are all ready to start on Monday? Your clothes are in good condition, I presume?"

Eleanor brought her gaze from a detached contemplation of the ceiling to a critical inspection of her finger-nails.

"I suppose Aunt Isobel has attended to them," she said indifferently.

"Aunt Isobel, indeed!" snarled Madam. "You 'd lean on a broken reed if you depended on Isobel. And Enid is no better. *I* attended to your clothes. I got you everything you need, even down to a new set of furs."

"Silver fox?" asked Eleanor, brightening visibly.

"No, mink. I can't abide fox. Ah! here 's what I am looking for. Your ticket and berth reservation. Train leaves at ten-thirty Monday morning."

"Grandmother," ventured Eleanor, summing up courage to lead a forlorn hope, "you are just wasting money sending me back to Baltimore."

"It 's my money," said the old lady grimly.

"It 's your money, but it is my life," Eleanor urged, with a quiver in her voice. "If you are going to send me away, why not send me to New York and let me do the one thing in the world I want to do?"

That Madam should be willing to furnish unlimited funds for finishing schools, music lessons, painting lessons, and every "extra" that the curriculum offered, and yet refuse to cultivate her one real talent, seemed to Eleanor the most unreasonable autocracy. She had no way of knowing that Madam's indomitable pride, still quivering with the memory of her oldest son's marriage to an unknown young actress, recoiled instinctively from the theatri-

cal rock on which so many of her old hopes had been wrecked.

Eleanor's persistence in recurring to this most distasteful of subjects roused her to fury. A purple flush suffused her face, and her cheeks puffed in and out as she breathed.

"I suppose Claude Martel has it all mapped out," she said. "He and that fool Harold Phipps have stirred you up to a pretty pitch. What do you see in that silly coxcomb, anyhow?"

"If you mean Captain Phipps," Eleanor said with dignity, "I see a great deal. He is one of the most cultivated men I ever met."

"Fiddlesticks! He smells like a soap-counter! When I see an affected man I see a fool. He has airs enough to fill a music-box. But that 's neither here nor there. You understand definitely that I do not wish you to see him again?"

Eleanor's silence did not satisfy Madam. She insisted upon a verbal assurance, which Eleanor was loath to give.

"I tell you once for all, young lady," said Madam, by this time roused to fury, "that you have *got* to do what I say for another year. After that you will be twenty-one, and you can go to the devil, if you want to."

"Grandmother!" cried Eleanor, shrinking as if from a physical blow. Then, remembering her promise to her Aunt Enid, she bit her lip and strug-

gled to keep back the tears. As she started to leave the room, Madam called her back.

"Here, take this," she said gruffly, thrusting a small morocco box into her hand. "Isobel and Enid never had decent necks to hang 'em on. See that you don't lose them." And without more ado she thrust Eleanor out of the room and shut the door in her face.

Eleanor fled down the hall to her own room, and after locking the door flung herself on the bed. It was always like that, she told herself passionately; they nagged at her and tormented her and wore her out with their care and anxiety, and then suffocated her with their affection. She did not want their presents. She wanted freedom, the right to live her own life, think her own thoughts, make her own decisions. She did not mean to be ungrateful, but she could n't please them all! The family expectations of her were too high, too different from what she wanted. Other girls with half her talents for the stage had succeeded, and just because she was a Bartlett——

She clenched her fists and wished for the hundredth time that she had never been born. She had been a bone of contention all her life, and, even when the two families were not fighting over her, the Bartlett blood was warring with the Martel blood within her. Her standards were hopelessly confused; she did not know what she wanted

except that she wanted passionately to be let alone.

"Nellie!" called a gentle voice on the other side of the door. "Are you ready for dinner?"

"Don't want any dinner," she mumbled from the depths of a pillow.

The door-handle turned softly and the voice persisted:

"You must unlock the door, dearie; I want to speak to you."

Eleanor flung herself off the bed and opened the door. "I tell you, I don't want any dinner, Aunt Enid," she declared petulantly.

Miss Enid drew her down on the bed beside her and regarded her with pensive persuasion. "I know, Nelchen; I often feel like that. But you must come down and make a pretense of eating. It upsets your grandmother to have any one of us absent from meals."

"Everything I do upsets her!" cried Eleanor with tragic insistence. "I can't please her—there 's no use trying. Why does she treat me the way she does? Why does she sometimes almost seem to hate me?"

Miss Enid's eyes involuntarily glanced at the picture of Eleanor's mother over the desk, taken in the doublet and hose of *Rosalind.*

"Hush, child; you must n't say such awful things," she said, drawing the girl close and stroking her hair. "Mother adores you. Think of all she has done for you ever since you were a tiny baby.

What other girl of your acquaintance has her own car, all the pretty clothes she can wear, and as much pin-money as she can spend?"

"But that's not what I *want!*" cried Eleanor tragically. "I want to *be* something and to *do* something. I feel like I am in prison here. I'm not good and resigned like you and Aunt Isobel, and I simply refuse to go through life standing grandmother's tyranny."

Poor Eleanor, so intolerably sensitive to contacts, so hopelessly confused in her bearings, sitting red-eyed and miserable, kicking her feet against the side of the bed, looked much more like a naughty child than like the radiant Lady Bountiful who had dispensed favors and received homage in the hospital a few hours before.

So swift was the sympathetic action of her nerves that any change in her physical condition affected her whole nature, making her an enigma to herself as well as to others. Even as she sat there rebellious and defiant, her eyes fell upon the small morocco box on her pillow, and she picked it up and opened it.

"Oh, Aunt Enid!" she cried in instant remorse. "Just look what she's given me! Her string of pearls! The ones she wore in the portrait! And just think of what I've been saying about her. I'm a beast, a regular little beast!"

And with characteristic impetuosity she flung herself on Miss Enid's neck and burst into tears.

CHAPTER 6

THE sun was getting ready to set on Sunday afternoon when a tall, trim-looking figure turned the corner of the street leading to the Martels' and broke into a run. In one hand he carried a large suit-case, and in the other he held a bead chain wrapped in tissue-paper. In the breast pocket of his uniform was a paper stating that Quinby Graham was thereby honorably discharged from the U.S.A.

Whether it was his enforced rest, or his state of mind, or a combination of the two, it is impossible to say; but at least ten pounds had been added to his figure, the hollows had about gone from his eyes, and a natural color had returned to his face. But the old cough remained, as was evident when he presented himself breathless at the Martels' door and demanded of Cass:

"Has she gone?"

"Who?"

"Miss Bartlett."

"I believe she 's fixing to go now. What 's it to you?"

"Oh, I just want to say good-by," Quin threw

off with a great show of indifference. "She was awful good to me out at the hospital."

"Oh, I see." Then Cass dismissed the subject for one of far more importance. "Are you out for keeps? Have you come to stay?"

"You bet I have. How long has she been here?"

"Who?"

"Miss Bartlett, I tell you."

"Oh! I don't know. All day, I reckon. I got to take her home now in a minute, but I 'll be back soon. Don't you go anywhere till I come back."

Quin seized his arm: "Cass, I 'll take her home for you. I don't mind a bit, honest I don't. I need some exercise."

"Old lady 'd throw a fit," objected Cass. "Old grandmother, I mean. Regular Tartar. Old aunts are just as bad. They devil the life out of Nell, except when she 's deviling the life out of them."

"How do you mean?" Quin encouraged him.

"I mean Nell 's a handful all right. She kicks over the traces every time she gets a chance. I don't blame her. They 're a rotten bunch of snobs, and she knows it."

"Well, I could leave her at the door," Quin urged. "I would n't let her in for anything for the world. But I got to talk to her, I tell you; I got to thank her——"

Meanwhile, in the room above the young lady under discussion was leisurely adjusting a new and

most becoming hat before a cracked mirror while she discussed a subject of perennial interest to the eternal feminine.

"Rose," she was asking, "what 's the first thing you notice about a man?"

Rose, sitting on the side of the bed nursing little Bino, the latest addition to the family, answered promptly:

"His mouth, of course. I would n't marry a man who showed his gums when he laughed, not if every hair of his head was strung with diamonds!"

The visualization of this unpleasant picture threw Eleanor into peals of laughter which upset the carefully acquired angle of the new hat, to say nothing of the nerves of the young gentleman just arrived in the hall below.

"I was n't thinking of his looks only," she said; "I mean everything about him."

"Why, I guess it 's whether he notices me," said Rose after deliberation.

"Exactly," agreed Eleanor. "Not only you or me, but girls. Take Cass, for instance; girls might just as well be broomsticks to Cass, all except Fan Loomis. Now, when Captain Phipps looks at you——"

"He never would," said Rose; "he 'd look straight over my head. I 'll tell you who is a better example—Mr. Graham."

Eleanor smiled reminiscently. "Oh, Sergeant

Slim? *he's* thrilled, all right! Always looks as if he could n't wait a minute to hear what you are going to say next."

"He 's not as susceptible as he looks," Rose pronounced from her vantage-point of seniority. "He 's just got a way with him that fools people. Cass says girls are always crazy about him, and that he never cares for any of them more than a week."

"Much Cass knows about it!" said Cass's cousin, pulling on her long gloves. Then she dismissed the subject abruptly: "Rose, if I tell you something will you swear not to tell?"

"Never breathe it."

"Captain Phipps is coming up to Baltimore for the Easter vacation."

"Does your grandmother know?"

"I should say *not*. She 's written Miss Hammond that I 'm not to receive callers without permission, and that all suspicious mail is to be opened."

"How outrageous! You tell Captain Phipps to send his letters to me; I 'll get them to you. They 'll never suspect my fine Italian hand, with my name and address on the envelope."

Eleanor looked at her older cousin dubiously. "I hate to do underhand things like that!" she said crossly.

"You would n't have to if they treated you decently. Opening your letters! The idea! I

would n't stand for it. I 'd show them a thing or two."

Eleanor stood listlessly buttoning her glove, pondering what Rose was saying.

"I wonder if I could get word to the Captain to-night?" she said. "Shall I really tell him to send the letters to you?"

"No; tell him to bring them. I 'm crazy to see what his nibs looks like."

"He looks like that picture of Richard Mansfield downstairs—the one taken as *Beau Brummel.* He 's the most fastidious man you ever saw, and too subtle for words."

"He 's terribly rich, is n't he?"

"I don't know," said Eleanor indifferently. "His father is a Chicago manufacturer of some kind. Does Papa Claude think he is *very* talented?"

"Talented! He says he 's one of the most gifted young men he ever met. They are hatching out some marvelous schemes to write a play together. Papa Claude is treading on air."

"Bless his heart! Would n't it be too wonderful, Rose, if Captain Phipps should produce one of his plays? He 's crazy about him."

"You mean he 's crazy about you."

"Who said so?"

"I don't have to be told. How about you, Nell? Are you in love with him?"

Eleanor, taking a farewell look in the mirror,

saw a tiny frown gather between her eyebrows. It was the second time that week she had been asked the question, and, as before, she avoided it.

"Listen!" she said. "Who is that talking so loud downstairs?"

Investigation proved that it was Cass and Quin in hot dispute, as usual. On seeing her descend the stair the latter promptly stepped forward.

"Cass is going to let me take you home, Miss Bartlett."

"I never said I would," Cass contradicted him. "I 'm not going to get her into trouble the night before she goes away."

"That 's for her to decide," said Quin. "If she says I can go I 'm going."

The very novelty of being called upon to decide anything for herself, augmented perhaps by the ardent desire in his eyes, caused Eleanor to tip the scales in his favor.

"I don't mind his taking me home," she said somewhat condescendingly. "They 'll think it 's Cass."

"All buck privates look alike to them," added Rose, laughing.

"My private days are over," said Quin grandly. "This time next week I 'll be out of my uniform."

"You won't be half so good-looking," said Eleanor, surveying him with such evident approval that he had a wild idea of reënlisting at once.

"Tell Papa Claude I could n't wait for him any longer," Eleanor then said. "Kiss him good-by for me, Rose, and tell him I 'll write the minute I get to Baltimore."

Then Cass kissed her, and Rose and the baby kissed her, and Myrna came downstairs to kiss her, and Edwin was called up from the basement to kiss her. It seemed the easiest and most natural thing in the world for everybody to kiss her but Quin, who would have given all he had for the privilege.

At last he found himself alone with her in the street, trying to catch step and wondering whether or not it was proper to take hold of a young lady's elbow. With commendable self-restraint he compromised on street crossings and muddy places. It was not quite dark yet, but it was going to be very soon, and a big pale moon was hiding behind a tall chimney, waiting for a chance to pounce out on unwary young couples who might be venturing abroad.

As they started across Central Park, an open square in the heart of the city, Eleanor stopped short, and with eyes fixed on the sky began incanting:

"Star light, star bright
Very first star I see to-night
Wish I may, wish I might—
May these three wishes come true
before to-morrow night."

"I have n't got three wishes," said Quin solemnly; "I 've only got one."

"Mercy, I have dozens! Shall I lend you some?"

"No! mine 's bigger than all yours put together."

She flashed a look at him from under her tilted hat-brim:

"What on earth 's the matter with you? You look so solemn. I don't believe you wanted to bring me home, after all."

Quin did n't know what was the matter with him. Heretofore he had fallen in love as a pebble falls into a pond. There had been a delicious splash, and subsequent encircling ripples, each one further away than the last. But this time the pebble had fallen into a whirlpool, and was being turned and tossed and played with in a manner wholly bewildering.

"Oh, I wanted to come, all right," he said slowly. "I *had* to come. Say, I wish you were n't going away to-morrow."

"So do I. I 'd give anything not to."

"But why do you go, then?"

"Because I am always made to do what I don't want to do."

Quin, who had decided views on individual freedom and the consent of the governed, promptly espoused her cause.

"They 've got no right to force you. You ought to decide things for yourself."

"Do you really think that? Do you think a girl

has the right to go ahead and do as she likes, regardless of her family?"

"That depends on whether she wants to do the right thing. Which way do we turn?"

"This way, if we go home," said Eleanor. Then she stopped abruptly. "What time is it?"

Quin consulted his watch and his conscience at the same time.

"It 's only five-thirty," he said eagerly.

"I wonder if you 'd do something for me?"

"You bet I will."

"I want to go out to the hospital. I can get out there and back in my machine in thirty minutes. Would you be willing to go with me?"

Would he be willing? Two hours before he had sworn that no power on earth could induce him to return to those prison walls, and now he felt that nothing could keep him away. Forty minutes of bliss in that snug little runabout with Miss Bartlett, and the destination might be Hades for all he cared.

It took but a few minutes to get to the garage and into the machine, and then they were speeding out the avenue at a pace that would surely have landed them in the police station had the traffic officer been on his job.

Quin, doubled up like a jack-knife beside her, was drunk with ecstasy. His expression when he looked at her resembled that of a particularly maudlin Airedale. Having her all to himself, with nobody

to interfere, was an almost overwhelming joy. He longed to pour out his soul in gratitude for all that she had done for him at the hospital; he burned to tell her that she was the most beautiful and holy thing that had ever come into his life; but instead he only got his foot tangled in the steering gear, and muttered something about her "not driving a car bad for a girl"!

But Eleanor was not concerned with her companion or his silent transports. She evidently had something of importance on her mind.

"What time is the officers' mess?" she asked.

"About six. Why?"

"I want to catch Captain Phipps before he leaves the hospital."

Quin's glowing bubble burst at the word. She *was* Captain Phipps' girl, after all! She had simply pressed him into service in order to get a last interview with the one officer in the battalion for whom he had no respect.

The guard challenged them as they swung into the hospital area, but, seeing Quin's uniform, allowed them to enter. Past the long line of contagious wards, past the bleak two-story convalescent barracks, and up to the officers' quarters they swept.

"You are not going in yourself?" Quin protested, as she started to get out of the car.

"Why not? Have n't I been coming out here all the time?"

"Not at night—not like this."

"Nonsense. What 's the harm? I 'll only be a minute?"

But Quin had already got out, and was holding the door with a large, firm hand.

"No," he said humbly but positively; "I 'll go and bring him out here."

The unexpected note of authority in his voice nettled her instantly.

"I shall go myself," she insisted petulantly. "Let me out."

For a moment their eyes clashed in frank combat, hers angry and defiant, his adoring but determined.

"Listen here, Miss Bartlett," he urged. "The men would n't understand your coming out like this, at night, without your uniform. I told Cass I 'd take care of you, and I 'm going to do it."

"You mean that you will dare to stop me from getting out of my own car? Take your hand off that door instantly!"

She actually seized his big, strong fingers with her small gloved ones and tried to pull them away from the door. But Quin began to laugh, and in spite of herself she laughed back; and, while the two were childishly struggling for the possession of the door-handle, Captain Phipps all unnoticed passed out of the mess-hall, gave a few instructions to his waiting orderly, and disappeared in the darkness.

CHAPTER 7

BY the time they were on their way home, the moon, no longer dodging behind chimneys, had swaggered into the open. It was a hardened old highwayman of a moon, red in the face and very full, and it declared with every flashing beam that it was no respecter of persons, and that it intended doing all the mischief possible down there in the little world of men.

Miss Eleanor Bartlett was its first victim. In the white twilight she forgot the social gap that lay between her and the youth beside her. She ceased to observe the size and roughness of his hands, but noted instead the fine breadth of his shoulders. She concerned herself no longer with his verbal lapses, but responded instead to his glowing confidence that everybody was as sincere and well intentioned as himself. She discovered what the more sophisticated Rose had perceived at once—that Quinby Graham "had a way with him," a beguiling, sympathetic way that made one tell him things that one really did n't mean to tell any one. Of course, it was partly due to the fact that he asked such outrageously direct questions, questions that no one in

her most intimate circle of friends would dare to ask. And the queer part of it was that she was answering them.

Before she realized it she was launched on a full recital of her woes, her thwarted ambition to go on the stage, her grandmother's tyranny, the indignity of being sent back to a school from which she had run away six months before. She flattered herself that she was stating her case for the sole purpose of getting an unprejudiced outsider's unbiased opinion; but from the inflection of her voice and the expressive play of eyes and lips it was evident that she was deriving some pleasure from the mere act of thus dramatizing her woes before that wholly sympathetic audience of one.

It was not until they reached the Eastern Parkway and were speeding toward the twinkling lights of the city that their little bubble of intimacy, blown in the moonlight, was shattered by a word.

"Say, Miss Eleanor," Quin blurted out unexpectedly, "do you like me?"

The question, together with the fact that he had dared used her first name, brought her up with a start.

"Like you?" she repeated in her most conventional tone. "Why, of course. Whatever made you think I did n't?"

"I did n't think that. But—do you like me

enough to let me come to see you when you come back?"

Now, a romantically wounded hero receiving favors in a hospital is one thing, and an unknown discharged soldier asking them is quite another. The very thought of Quinby Graham presenting himself as a caller, and the comments that would follow made Eleanor shy away from the subject in alarm.

"Oh, you 'll be on the other side of the world by the time I get back," she said lightly.

"Not me. Not if there 's a chance of seeing you again."

A momentary diversion followed, during which Eleanor fancied there was something wrong with the radiator and expatiated at length on her preference for air-cooled cars.

Quin listened patiently. A gentleman more versed in social subtleties would have accepted the hint and said no more. But he was still laboring under the error that language was invented to reveal rather than to conceal thought.

"You did n't answer my question," he said, when Eleanor paused for breath.

"What question?"

"About my coming to see you."

She took shelter in a subterfuge.

"I told you that the family was horrid to every-

body that came to see me. To tell you the truth, I don't think you would be comfortable."

"I 'm not afraid of 'em," Quin insisted fatuously. "I 'd butt in anywhere to get to see you."

Eleanor's eyes dropped under his gaze.

"You don't know my grandmother," she said; "and, what is much more important, she does n't know you."

"No, but she might like to," urged Quin, with one of his most engaging smiles. "Old ladies and cats always cotton to me."

Eleanor laughed. It was impossible to be dignified and superior with a person who did n't know the first rules of the game.

"She might," she admitted; "you never can tell about grandmother. She really is a wonderful person in many ways, and just as generous and kind when you are in trouble! But she says the most dreadful things; she 's always hurting people's feelings."

"She could n't hurt mine, unless I let her," said Quin.

"Oh, yes, she could—you don't know her. But even if she happened to be nice to you, there 's Aunt Isobel."

"What is she like?"

"*Horribly* good and conscientious, and shocked to death at everything people do and say. I don't mean that she is n't awfully kind. She 'll do any-

thing for you if you are sick. But Uncle Ranny says her sense of duty amounts to a vice. Whatever she 's doing, she thinks she ought to be doing something else. And she expects you to be just as good as she is. If she knew I was out here with a strange man to whom I 'd never been introduced——"

Eleanor was appalled at the effect upon her aunt of such indiscretion.

"Oh, I could handle her all right," said Quin boastfully. "I 'd talk foreign missions to her. Any others?"

"Heaps. There 's Aunt Flo and Uncle Ranny. He 's a dear, only he 's the black sheep of the family. He says I am a promising gray lamb, which makes grandmother furious. They all let her twist them round her finger but me. I won't twist. I never intend to."

"Is that all the family?"

"No; there 's Aunt Enid. She is the nicest of them all."

"What is her line?"

"Oh, she 's awfully good, too. But she 's different from Aunt Isobel. She was engaged to be married once, and grandmother broke it off because the man was poor. I don't think she 'll ever get over it."

"Do you think she would like me?" Quin anxiously inquired.

"Yes," admitted Eleanor, "I believe she would. She simply adores to mold people. She does n't

care how many faults they have, if they will just let her influence them to be better. And she does help loads of people. I am her one failure. She would n't acknowledge it for the world, but I know that I am the disappointment of Aunt Enid's life."

She gazed gloomily down the long moonlit road and lapsed into one of her sudden abstractions. A belated compunction seized her for not going straight home from the Martels', for being late for dinner on her last night, for going on with her affair with Captain Phipps, when she had been forbidden to see him.

"Miss Nell," said the persistent voice beside her, "do you know what I intend to do while you are away?"

"No; what?"

"I 'm going to start in to-morrow morning and make love to your whole darn family!"

Now, if there is one thing Destiny admires in a man, it is his courage to defy her. She relentlessly crushes the supine spirit who acquiesces, but to him who snaps his fingers in her face she often extends a helping hand. In this case she did not make Quin wait until the morrow to begin his colossal undertaking. By means of a humble tack that lay in the way of the speeding automobile, she at once set in motion the series of events that were to determine his future life.

By the time the puncture was repaired and they

were again on their way, it was half-past seven and all hope of a timely arrival was abandoned. As they slowed up at the Bartlett house, their uneasiness was increased by the fact that lights were streaming from every window and the front door was standing open.

"Is that the doctor?" an excited voice called to them from the porch.

"No," called back Eleanor, scrambling out of the car. "What is the matter?"

No answer being received, she clutched Quin's sleeve nervously.

"Something has happened! Look, the front hall is full of people. Oh, I 'm afraid to go in! I——"

"Steady on!" said Quin, with a firm grip on her elbow as he marched her up the steps and into the hall.

Everything was in confusion. People were hurrying to and fro, doors were slamming, excited voices were asking questions and not waiting for answers. "What 's Dr. Snowden's telephone number?" "Can't they get another doctor?" "Has somebody sent for Randolph?" "Are they going to try to move her?" everybody demanded of everybody else.

Eleanor pushed through the crowd until she reached the foot of the steps. There, lying on the floor, with her towering white pompadour crushed ignominiously against the newel-post, lay the one person in the house who could have brought prompt

order out of the chaos. On one side of her knelt Miss Enid frantically applying smelling salts, while on the other stood Miss Isobel futilely wringing her hands and imploring some one to go for a minister.

Suddenly the buzz of excited talk ceased. Madam was returning to consciousness. She groaned heavily, then opened one eye.

"What 's the matter?" she demanded feebly. "What 's all this fuss about?"

"You fell down the steps, mother. Don't get excited; don't try to move."

But Madam had already tried, with the result that she fell back with a sharp cry of pain.

"Oh, my leg, my leg!" she groaned. "What are you all standing around like fools for? Why don't you send Tom for the doctor?"

"Tom is n't with us any more, dearest," said Aunt Enid with trembling reassurance, "and Dr. Snowden is out of town. But we are trying to get Dr. Bean."

"I won't have Bean," Madam declared, clinching her jaw with pain. "I 'll send him away if he comes."

"Dr. Vaughn, then?" suggested Miss Enid tenderly.

"Vaughn nothing! Send for Rawlins. He 's an old stick, but he 'll do till Dr. Snowden gets here."

"But, mother," protested Miss Isobel. "Dr.

Rawlins lives in the country; he can't get here for half an hour."

"Do as I tell you and stop arguing," commanded Madam. "Has anybody telephoned Ranny?"

The two sisters exchanged significant glances.

"Their line is busy," said Miss Enid soothingly. "We will get him soon."

"I want to be taken upstairs," announced Madam; "I want to be put in my own bed."

A buzz of protest met this suggestion, and a small, nervous man in clerical garb, who had just arrived, came forward to add his voice to the rest.

Madam glared at him savagely. "There 'll be plenty of time for parsons when the doctors get through with me," she said. "Tell some of those able-bodied men back there to come here and take me upstairs."

Quin, who had been standing in the background looking down at the formidable old lady, promptly came forward.

"I 'll take you up," he said. "Which leg is hurt?"

The old lady turned her head and looked up at him. The note of confidence in his voice had evidently appealed to her.

"It 's my left leg. I think it 's broken just above the knee."

"Do you want me to put a splint on it?"

"Are you a doctor?"

"No, ma'am; but I can fix it so 's it won't hurt

you so bad when we move you," Quin replied.

"How do you know you can?"

Quin ran his fingers through his hair and smiled.

"Well, I was n't with the Ambulance Corps for six months in France for nothing."

Madam eyed him keenly for a moment; then, "Go ahead," she commanded.

A chorus of protests from the surrounding group only deepened her determination.

"It 's *my* leg," she said irritably. "If he knows how to splint it, let him do it. I want to be taken upstairs."

It is difficult enough to apply a splint properly under favorable circumstances; but when one has only an umbrella and table napkins to work with, and is hemmed in by a doubtful and at times protesting audience, it becomes well-nigh impossible.

Quin worked slowly and awkwardly, putting the bones as nearly as possible in position and then binding them firmly in place. He paid no more attention to the agitated comments of those about him than he had paid to the whizzing bullets when he rendered first aid to a fallen comrade in No Man's Land.

During the painful operation Madam lay with rigid jaws and clenched fists. Small beads of perspiration gathered on her forehead and her lips were white. Now and then she flinched violently, but only once did she speak, and that was when Miss Enid

held the smelling salts too close to her high-bridged nose.

"Have n't I got enough to stand without that?" she sputtered, knocking the bottle into the air and sending the contents flying over the polished floor.

When Quin finished he looked at her with frank admiration.

"You got nerve, all right," he said; then he added gently: "Don't you worry about getting upstairs; it won't hurt you much now."

"You stay and help," said Madam peremptorily.

"Sure," said Quin.

It was not until she was in her own bed, and word had come that Dr. Rawlins was on his way, that she would let Quin go, and even then she called him back.

"You! Soldier! Come here," was the faint edict from the canopied bed. She was getting very weak from the pain, and her words came in gasps. "Do you know where—the—Aristo Apartments are?"

"No, but I can find out," said Quin.

"I want you—to—go for my son—Mr. Randolph Bartlett. If he 's not at home—you find him. I 'll make it—worth your while."

"I 'll find him," Quin said, with a reassuring pat on her wrinkled hand.

As he went into the hall, Eleanor slipped out of the adjoining room and followed him silently down the stairs. She did not speak until they were at

the front door, and even then took the precaution of stepping outside.

"I just wanted to come down and say good-by," she said.

"But you surely won't be going now?" said Quin hopefully.

"Yes, I 'm to go. Grandmother has just told Aunt Isobel that everything is to be carried out exactly as she planned it. But I wish they 'd let me stay and help. Poor granny!"

Her eyes brimmed with ready tears.

"She 'll pull through all right," said Quin, to whom the tear-dimmed eyes of youth were more unnerving than age's broken bones. "Don't worry, Miss Eleanor, please. What time does your train go in the morning?"

"Ten-thirty."

"I 'll be there at ten."

Eleanor brushed her tears away quickly. "No, no—you must n't," she said in quick alarm. "They don't know that we ever saw each other before. They think you just happened to be passing and ran in to help. Oh, I don't want to give them any more trouble. Promise me not to come!"

"Well, when you come back, then?"

"Yes, yes, when I come back," she whispered hurriedly. Then she put out her hand impulsively. "I think you 've been perfectly splendid to-night. Good-by."

For a moment she stood there, her dainty figure silhouetted against the bright doorway, with the light shining through her soft hair giving her an undeserved halo. Then she was gone, leaving him on the steps in the moonlight, tenderly contemplating the hand that had just held hers.

CHAPTER 8

IT was well that Quin had an errand to perform that night. His emotions, which had been accumulating compound interest since five o'clock, demanded an outlet in immediate action. He had not the faintest idea where the Aristo Apartments might be; but, wherever they were, he meant to find them. Consultation with a telephone book at the corner drug-store sent him across the city to a newer and more fashionable residence quarter. As he left the street-car at the corner indicated, he asked a man who was just dismounting from a taxi-cab for further information.

When the dapper gentleman, thus addressed, turned toward him, it was evident that he had dined not wisely but too well. He was at that mellow stage that radiates affection, and, having bidden a loving farewell to the taxi driver, he now linked his arm in Quin's and repeated gaily:

"'Risto? Of course I can find it for you, if it's where it was this morning! Always make a point of helping a man that's worse off than I am. Always help a sholdier, anyhow. Take my arm, old chap. Take my cane, too. I'll help you."

Thus assisted and assisting, Quin good-humoredly allowed himself to be conducted in a zigzag course to the imposing doorway of a large apartment-house across the street.

"Forgive me f' taking you up stairway," apologized the affable gentleman. "Must n't let elevator boy see you in this condishun. Take you up to my apartment. Put you bed in m' own room. Got to take care sholdiers."

At the second floor Quin tried to disentangle himself from his new-found protector.

"You can find your way home now, partner," he said. "I got to go down and find out which floor my party lives on."

But his companion held him tight.

"No, my boy! Must n't go out again to-night. M.P.'s 'll catch you. I 'll get you to bed without anybody knowing. Must n't 'sturb my wife, though. Must n't make any noise." And, adding force to persuasion, he got his arms around Quin and backed him so suddenly against the wall that they both took an unexpected seat on the floor.

At this inopportune moment a door opened and a delicate blonde lady in a pink kimono, followed by an inquisitive poodle, peered anxiously out.

"'S perfectly all right, darling!" reassured the nethermost figure blithely. "Sholdier friend 's had a little too much champagne. Bringing him in so 's

won't be 'rested. Nicest kind of chap. Perfectly harmless!"

Quin scrambled to his feet and exchanged an understanding look with the lady in the doorway.

"I found him down at the corner. Does he belong here?" he asked. And, upon being informed sorrowfully that he did, he added obligingly, "Don't you want me to bring him in for you?"

"Will you?" said the lady in grateful agitation. "The maids are both out, and I can't handle him by myself. Would you mind bringing him into his bedroom?"

Quin succeeded in detaching an affectionate arm from his right leg and, getting his patient up, piloted him into the apartment.

"I 'd just as leave put him to bed for you if you like?" he offered, noting the nervousness of the lady, who was fluttering about like a distracted butterfly.

"Oh, would you?" she asked. "It would help me immensely. If he is n't put to bed he is sure to want to go out again."

"Shure to!" heartily agreed the object of their solicitude. "Leave him to me, darling. I 'll hide his uniform so 's he can't go out. Be a good girl, run along—I 'll take care of him."

Thus left to each other, a satisfactory compromise was effected by which the host agreed to be undressed and put to bed, provided Quin would later

submit to the same treatment. It was not the first time Quin had thus assisted a brother in misfortune, but he had never before had to do with gold buttons and jeweled cuff-links, to say nothing of silk underwear and sky-blue pajamas. Being on the eve of adopting civilian clothes for the first time in two years, he took a lively interest in every detail of his patient's attire, from the modish cut of his coat to the smart pattern of his necktie.

The bibulous one, who up to the present had regarded the affair as humorous, now began to be lachrymose, and by the time Quin got him into the rose-draped bed he was in a state of deep dejection.

"My mother loves me," he assured Quin tearfully. "Gives me everything. I don't mean to be ungrateful. But I can't go on in the firm. Bangs is dishonest, but she won't believe it. She thinks I don't know. They both think I 'm a cipher. I *am* a cipher. But they 've made me one. Get so discouraged, then go break over like this. Promised Flo never would take another drink. But it 's no use. Can't help myself. I 'm done for. Just a cipher, a cipher, a ci——"

Quin standing by the bed waiting for him to get through adding noughts to his opinion of himself, suddenly leaned forward and examined the picture that hung above the table. It was of an imperial old lady in black velvet, with a string of pearls about her throat and a tiara on her towering white

pompadour. His glance swept from the photograph to the flushed face with the tragic eyes on the pillow, and he seemed to hear a querulous old voice repeating: "Ranny—I want Ranny. Why don't they send for Ranny?"

With two strides he was at the door.

"Are you Mrs. Randolph Bartlett?" he asked of the lady who was nervously pacing the hall.

"Yes; why?"

"Because they sent me after him. It 's his mother, you see—she 's hurt."

"Madam Bartlett? What 's happened?"

"She fell down the steps and broke her leg."

"How terrible! But she must n't know about him," cried Mrs. Ranny in instant alarm. "It always makes her furious when he breaks over; and yet, she is to blame—she drives him to it."

"How do you mean?" asked Quin, plunging into the situation with his usual temerity.

"I mean that she has dominated him, soul and body, ever since he was born!" cried Mrs. Ranny passionately. "She has forced him to stay in the business when every detail of it is distasteful to him. His life is a perfect hell there under Mr. Bangs. He ought to have an outdoor life. He loves animals—he ought to be on a ranch." She pulled herself up with an effort. "Forgive me for going into all this before a stranger, but I am almost beside myself. Of course I am sorry for Madam

Bartlett, but what can I do? You can see for yourself that my husband is in no condition to go to her."

"Can't you say he 's sick?"

"She would n't believe it. She 's suspicious of everything I do and say. Do you *have* to take back an answer?"

"I told the old lady I 'd find him for her. You see, I 'm a—sort of a friend of Miss Eleanor's."

Under ordinary circumstances Mrs. Ranny would have been the last to accept this without an explanation; but there were too many other problems pressing for her to worry about this one.

"I wonder how it would do," she said, "for you to telephone that we are both out of town for the night, spending the week-end in the country?"

"I guess one lie is as good as another," said Quin ruefully. He was getting involved deeper than he liked, but there seemed no other way out. "I 'll telephone from the drug-store. Anything else I can do for you?"

"You have been so kind, I hate to ask another favor."

"Let 's have it," said Quin.

"Would you by any chance have time to leave a package of papers at Bartlett & Bangs' for me the first thing in the morning? Mr. Bangs has been telephoning me about them all day, and I 've been

nearly distracted, because my husband had them in his pocket and I did not know where he was."

"Wait a minute," said Quin, going back into the bedroom. "Are these the ones?"

"Yes. They must be very important; that 's why I am afraid to intrust them to my maid. Be sure to take them to Mr. Bangs himself, and if he asks any questions——" She caught her trembling lip between her teeth and tried to force back the tears.

"Don't you worry!" cried Quin. "I 'll make it all right with him. You drink a glass of hot milk or something, and go to bed."

She looked up at him gratefully. "I don't know your name," she said, "but I certainly appreciate your kindness to me to-night. I wish you would come back some time and let us thank you——"

"Oh, that 's all o.k.," said Quin, turning to the door in sudden embarrassment. Then he discovered that he was trying to shake hands and hold his cap with the same hand, and in his confusion he slipped on the hard-wood floor, and achieved an exit that was scarcely more dignified than his entrance a half-hour before.

CHAPTER 9

THE news that Quin had broken through the Bartlett barrage afforded great amusement to the Martels at breakfast next morning. Of course they were sympathetic over Madam Bartlett's accident—the Martels' sympathy was always on tap for friend or foe,—but that did not interfere with a frank enjoyment of Quin's spirited account of her high-handed treatment of the family, especially the incident of the smelling salts.

"She ought to belong to the Tank Brigade," said Rose. " 'Treat 'em rough' is her motto."

"I like the old girl, though," said Quin disrespectfully, "she 's got so much pep. And talk about your nerve! You should have seen her set her jaw when I put the splint on!"

"Is the house very grand?" asked Myrna, hungering for luxurious details.

"No," Cass broke in scornfully. "I been in the hall twice. It looks like a museum—big pictures and statuary, and everything dark and gloomy."

"Yes, and Miss Isobel and Miss Enid are the mummies," added Rose. "The only nice one in the

bunch besides Nell is Mr. Ranny, and he is hardly ever sober."

"Well, I would n't be, either," said Cass, "if I 'd been held down like he has all his life. The Bartlett estate was left in trust to the old lady, and she holds the purse-strings and has the say-so about everything."

Quin refrained from mentioning the fact that he had also met Mr. Ranny. It was a point to his credit, for the story would have been received with hilarity, and he particularly enjoyed making Rose laugh.

The entrance of Mr. Martel put an end to the discussion of the Bartletts. Bitter as was his animosity toward the old lady, he would permit no disrespect to be shown her or hers in his presence. In the garish light of day he looked a trifle less imposing than he had on New Year's eve in the firelight. His long white hair hung straight and dry about his face; baggy wrinkles sagged under his eyes and under his chin. The shoulders that once proudly carried Mark Antony's shining armor now supported a faded velvet breakfast jacket that showed its original color only in patches. But even in the intimacy of the breakfast hour Papa Claude preserved his air of distinction, the gracious condescension of a temporary sojourner in an environment from which he expected at any moment to take flight.

When Cass had gone to work and the girls were busy cleaning up the breakfast dishes, he linked his arm in Quin's and drew him into the living-room.

"I have never allowed myself to submit to the tyranny of time!" he said. "The wine of living should be tasted slowly. Pull up a chair, my boy; I want to talk to you. You don't happen to have a cigar about you, do you?"

"Yes, sir. Here are two. Take 'em both. I got to cut out smoking; it makes me cough."

Mr. Martel, protesting and accepting at the same time, sank into his large chair and bade Quin pull up a rocker. In the Martels' living-room all the chairs were rockers; so, in fact, were the table and the sofa, owing to missing castors.

"I am going to talk to you quite confidentially," began Mr. Martel, giving himself up to the enjoyment of the hour. "I am going to tell you of a new and fascinating adventure upon which I am about to embark. You have doubtless heard me speak of a very wealthy and talented young friend of mine—Mr. Harold Phipps?"

Quin admitted without enthusiasm that he had, and that he also knew him.

"Well, Mr. Phipps,—or Captain, as you probably know him,—after a short medical career has found it so totally distasteful that he is wisely returning to an earlier love. As soon as he gets out of the army he and I are going to collaborate on a play.

Of course I have technic at my finger-tips. Construction, dramatic suspense, climax are second nature to me. But I confess I have a fatal handicap, one that has doubtless cost me my place at the head of American dramatists to-day. I have never been able to achieve colloquial dialogue! My style is too finished, you understand, my diction too perfect. Manager after manager has been on the verge of accepting a play, and been deterred solely on account of this too literary quality. I suffer from the excess of my virtue; you see?"

Quin did not see. Mr. Martel's words conveyed but the vaguest meaning to him. But it flattered his vanity to be the recipient of such a great man's confidence.

"Well, here's my point," continued his host impressively. "Mr. Phipps knows nothing of technic, of construction; but he has a sense for character and dialogue that amounts to genius. Now, suppose I construct a great plot, and he supplies great dialogue? What will be the inevitable result? A masterpiece, a little modern masterpiece!"

Mr. Martel, soaring on the wings of his imagination, failed to observe that his listener was not following.

"Does—does Miss Eleanor know about all this?" Quin asked.

"Alas, no. I had no opportunity to tell her.

Ah, Mr. Graham, I must confess, it hurts me, it hurts me here,"—he indicated a grease-spot just below his vest pocket,—"to be separated from that dear child just when she needs me most. She should be already embarked in her great career. Ellen Terry, Bernhardt, Rachel, all began their training very early. If she had been left to me she would be behind the footlights by now."

"They 'll never stand for her going on the stage," said Quin authoritatively. It was astonishing how intimate he felt with the Bartletts since he had put two of them to bed.

"Ah, my friend," said Mr. Martel, shaking his head and smiling, "what can be avoided whose end is purposed by the mighty gods? Eleanor will follow her destiny. She has the temperament, the voice, the figure—a trifle small, I grant you, but lithe, graceful, pliant as a reed."

"Yes, I know what you mean," Quin agreed ardently; "you can tell that in her dancing."

"But more than all, she has the great ambition, the consuming desire for self-expression, for——"

Quin's face clouded slightly and he again lost the thread of the discourse.

"Lots of girls are stage-struck," he said presently, breaking in on Mr. Martel's rhapsody. "Miss Eleanor 's young yet. Don't you believe she will get over it?"

"Young! Why, Mary Anderson was playing

Meg Merrilies when she was two years younger than Eleanor. I tell you, Quinby—you 'll forgive my addressing you thus—I tell you, the girl will never get over it. She has inherited the histrionic gift from her mother—from me. The Bartletts have given her money, education, social position; but it remained for me—the despised Claude Martel —to give her the soul of an artist. And mark me,"—he paused effectively with a lifted forefinger, —"it will be Claude Martel who gives her her heart's desire. For years I have fostered in her a love for the drama. I have taken her to see great plays. I have taught her to read great lines, and above all I have fed her ambition. The time was limited—a night here, a day there; but I planted a seed they cannot kill. It has grown, it will flower; no one can stop it now."

The subject was one upon which Quin would fain have discoursed indefinitely, but a glance at his watch reminded him that the business of the day did not admit of further delay. He not only had an important errand to perform, but he must look for work. His exchequer, as usual, was very low and the need for replenishing it was imperative.

When he reached Bartlett & Bangs' on the outskirts of the city, the big manufacturing plant was ominously still. The only sign of life about the place was at the wide entrance doors at the end of

the yards, where a group of men were talking and gesticulating excitedly.

"What 's the shindy?" Quin asked a bystander.

"Union men trying to keep scabs from going to work," answered his informant. "Somebody 's fixin' to get hurt there in about two minutes."

Quin, to whom a scrap was always a pleasant diversion, ran forward and craned his neck to see what was happening. Speeches were being made, hot impassioned speeches, now in favor of the union, now against it, and every moment the excitement increased. Quin listened with absorbed attention, trying to get the straight of the matter.

Just now a sickly-looking man, with a piece of red flannel tied around his throat, was standing on the steps, making a futile effort against the noise to explain his return to work.

"I can't let 'em *starve,*" he kept repeating in a hoarse, apologetic voice. "When a man 's got a sick wife and eight children, he ain't able to do as he likes. I don't want to give in no more 'n you-all do. Neither does Jim here, nor Tom Dawes. But what can we do?"

"Do like the rest of us!" shouted some one in the crowd. "Stick it out! Learn 'em a lesson. They can't run their bloomin' old plant without us. Pull him down off them steps, boys!"

"Naw, you don't!" cried another man, seizing a stick and jumping at the steps. "We got a right to

do as we like, same as you! Come on up, Tom Dawes! We ain't going to let our families in for the Charity Organization."

Quick cries of "Traitor!" "Scab!" "Pull 'em down!" were succeeded by a lively scrimmage in which there was a rush for the steps.

Quin, from his place at the edge of the crowd, saw a dozen men surround three. He saw the man with the red rag about his throat put up a feeble defense against two assailants. Then he ceased to see and began only to feel. Whatever the row was about, they were n't fighting fairly, and his blood began to rise. He stood it as long as he could; then, with a cry of protest, he plunged through the crowd. In his sternest top-sergeant voice he issued orders, and enforced them with a brawny fist that was used to handling men. A moment later he dragged a limp victim from under the struggling group.

This unexpected interruption by an unknown man in uniform, together with the appearance of a stern-faced man in spectacles at an upper window, had an instant effect on the crowd. The strikers began to slink out of the yards, while the three assaulted men dusted their clothes and entered the factory.

Quin followed them in, and upon inquiring for the office was directed to the second floor, where he followed devious ways until he reached the door of

a large room filled with desks in rows, at each of which sat a clerk.

"Mr. Bangs?" repeated a red-nosed girl, in answer to his inquiry. "Got an appointment?"

"No," said Quin; "but I 've got a parcel that 's to be delivered in person."

The red-nosed one thereupon consulted the man at the next desk, and, after some colloquy, conducted Quin to one of the small rooms at the rear of the large one.

The next moment Quin found himself face to face with the stern-looking personage whose mere appearance at the window a few minutes before had had such a subduing effect on the crowd below.

As he listened to Quin's message he looked at him narrowly and suspiciously with piercing black eyes that seemed intent on seeking out the weakest spot of whatever they rested upon.

"When did Mr. Bartlett give you these letters?" he asked in a tone as cold as the tinkle of ice against glass.

"I got 'em last night, sir."

"Where?"

"At his house, when I went to carry word about his mother's accident."

"Close that door back of you," said Mr. Bangs, with a jerk of his head; then he went on. "So Mr. Bartlett was at home when you reached there last night?"

"Oh, *yes,* sir!" Quin assured him with an emphasis that implied Mr. Randolph Bartlett's unfailing presence at his own fireside on every Sabbath evening.

"That is strange," Mr. Bangs commented dryly. "Miss Enid Bartlett telephoned an hour ago that her brother and his wife were out of the city."

Quin was visibly embarrassed. He was not used to treading the quicksands of duplicity, and he felt himself sinking.

"Young man," said Mr. Bangs sternly, "I am inclined to think you are deceiving me."

"No," said Quin with spirit, "I have n't deceived you; but I did lie to Miss Eleanor's aunt over the telephone."

"What was your object?"

"Well, I could n't tell her Mr. Bartlett was stewed, could I?"

Mr. Bangs gave a short, contemptuous laugh. "As I thought," he said. "That will do."

But Quin had no intention of going until he had spoken a word in his own behalf. The idea had just occurred to him that by obtaining a position with Bartlett & Bangs he could add another link to the chain that was to bind him to Eleanor.

"You don't happen to have a job for me?" he inquired of the back of Mr. Bangs's bald, dome-like head.

"A job?" repeated Mr. Bangs, glancing over his shoulder at Quin's uniform.

"Yes, sir. I 'm out of the service now."

"What can you do?"

Quin looked at him quizzically. "I can receive and obey the orders of the commanding officer," he said.

Mr. Bangs, being humor-proof, evidently considered this impertinent, and repeated his question sharply.

"Oh, I 'll do anything," said Quin rashly. "Soldiers can't be choosers these days."

Mr. Bangs cast a critical eye on his strong, well built frame:

"We might use you in the factory," he said indifferently; "we need all the strike-breakers we can get."

Quin's face fell. "I don't know about that," he said slowly. "I have n't made up my mind yet about this union business."

"I thought you were helping the union men in the yard just now."

"I was helping that little Irishman that was getting the life choked out of him."

Mr. Bangs's mouth became a hard, straight line.

"Then I take it you sympathize with the strikers?"

"I don't know whether I do or not," Quin declared stoutly. "I don't know anything about it. But one thing 's certain—I 'm not going to take another

fellow's job, when he 's holding out for better conditions, until I know whether those better conditions are due him or not."

Mr. Bangs's fish eyes regarded him with glittering disfavor.

"Perhaps you would prefer an office job?" he suggested with cold insolence. "I need some one to brush out in the morning and to wash windows when necessary."

The erstwhile hero of the Sixth Field Artillery felt his heart thumping madly under his distinguished-conduct medal; but he had declared that he would accept any kind of work, and he was determined not to have his bluff called.

"All right, sir," he said gamely; "I 'll start at that if it will lead to something better."

"That rests entirely with you," said Mr. Bangs. "Report for work in the morning."

Quin got out of the office with a hot head, cold hands, and a terrible sinking of the heart. He had forged the first link in his chain—he was an employee of the great Bartlett & Bangs Company; but the gap between himself and Eleanor seemed suddenly to have widened to infinity.

CHAPTER 10

IF the window-washing did not become an actuality, it was due to the weather rather than to any clemency on the part of Mr. Bangs. He seemed bent upon testing Quin's mettle, and required tasks of him that only a man used to the discipline of the army would have performed.

Quin, on his part, carried out instructions with a thoroughness and dispatch that upset the entire office force. He had been told to clean things up, and he took an unholy joy in interpreting the order in military terms. Never before had there been such a drastic overhauling of the premises. He did not stop at cleaning up; he insisted upon things being kept clean and orderly. In a short time he had instituted reforms that broke the traditions of half a century.

"Who moved my desk out like this?" thundered Mr. Bangs on the second day after Quin's arrival.

"I did, sir," said Quin. "You can get a much better light here, and no draught from the door."

"Well, when I want my desk moved I will inform you," said Mr. Bangs.

But a day's trial of the new arrangement proved

so satisfactory that the desk remained in its new position.

Other innovations met with less favor. The clerks in the outer office objected to the windows being kept down from the top, and Mr. Bangs was constantly annoyed when he found that his papers were disturbed by a daily dusting and sorting. Quin met the complaints and rebuffs with easy good humor, and went straight on with his business. The moment his energies were dammed at one point, they burst forth with fresh vigor at another.

The only object about the office that was left undisturbed was Minerva, a large black cat which the stenographer told him belonged to Mr. Randolph Bartlett. Quin was hopelessly committed to cats in general, and to black cats in particular, and the fact that this one met with Mr. Bangs's marked disfavor made him champion her cause at once. One noon hour, in his first week, he was sitting alone in the inner office, scratching Minerva's head in the very spot behind the ear where a cat most likes to be scratched, when a lively voice from the doorway demanded:

"Well, young man, what do you mean by making love to my cat in my absence?"

"She flirted with me first," said Quin. Then he took a second look at the stranger and got up smiling. "You are Mr. Bartlett, I believe?"

"Yes. Are you waiting for Mr. Bangs?"

"No, sir," said Quin; "he 's waiting for me. I 'm to let him know as soon as you come in. I am the new office-boy."

He grinned down on the shorter man, who in his turn laughed outright.

"Office-boy? What nonsense! Where have I seen you before? What is your name?"

"Quinby Graham, sir."

"Drop the sir, for heaven's sake. I 'm no officer. Where in the dickens have I met you? Oh! wait a second, I 've got it! Sunday night. We were out somewhere together——"

"Hold on there," said Quin. "*You* were out together, but I was out by myself. We met at your door."

"So you were the chap that played the good Samaritan? Well, it was damned clever of you, old man. I 'm glad of a chance to thank you. I had n't touched a drop for six weeks before that, but you see——"

Mr. Bangs's metallic voice was heard in the outer office, and the two younger men started.

"You bet I see!" said Quin sympathetically as he hurried out to inform the senior member of the firm that the junior member awaited his pleasure.

What happened at that interview was recounted to him by Miss Leaks, the little drab-colored stenographer, who had returned from lunch when the storm was at its height.

"It 's a wonder Mr. Ranny don't kill that old man for the way he sneers at him," she said indignantly to Quin. "Why, *I* would n't take off him what Mr. Ranny does! But then, what can he do? His mother keeps him here for a mouth-piece for her, and Mr. Bangs knows it. It 's no wonder he drinks, hitched up to a cantankerous old hyena like that. He never can stand up for himself, but he stood up for you all right."

"For me?" repeated Quin. "Where did I come in?"

"Why, he said it was a shame for a man like you to be doing the work you are doing, and that he for one would n't stand it. He talked right up to the boss about patriotism and our duty to the returned soldier, until he made the old tyrant look like ten cents! And then he come right out and said if Mr. Bangs could n't offer you anything better he could."

"What did he say to that?" asked Quin.

"He curled up his lip and asked Mr. Ranny why he did n't engage you for a private secretary, and if you 'll believe me Mr. Ranny looked him straight in the eye and said it was a good idea, and that he would."

"A private secretary!" Quin exclaimed. "But I don't know a blooming thing about stenography or typewriting."

"Don't you let on," advised Miss Leaks. "Mr. Ranny does n't have enough work to amount to any-

thing, and he 's so tickled at carrying his point that he won't be particular. I can teach you how to take dictation and use the typewriter."

The following week found Quin installed in the smaller of the two private offices, with a title that in no way covered the duties he was called upon to perform. To be sure, he got Mr. Ranny's small affairs into systematic running order, and, under Miss Leaks's efficient instruction, was soon able slowly but accurately to hammer out the necessary letters on the typewriter. He was even able at times to help Mr. Chester, the melancholy book-keeper whom the other clerks called "Fanny."

Through working with figures all his life Mr. Chester had come to resemble one. With his lean body and drooping oval head, he was not unlike the figure nine, an analogy that might be continued by saying that nine is the highest degree a bachelor number can achieve, the figures after that going in couples. It was an open secret that the tragedy of Mr. Chester's uneventful life lay in that simple fact.

In addition to Quin's heterogeneous duties at the office, he was frequently pressed into service for more personal uses. When Mr. Ranny failed to put in an appearance, he was invariably dispatched to find him, and was often able to handle the situation in a way that was a great relief to all concerned.

One day, after he had been with the firm several

weeks, he was dispatched with a budget of papers for Madam Bartlett to sign. It was the first time he had entered the house since the night of the accident, and as he stood in the front hall waiting instructions, he looked about him curiously.

The lower floor had been "done" in peacock blue and gold when Miss Enid made her début twenty years before, and it had never been undone. An embossed dado and an even more embossed frieze encircled the walls, and the ceiling was a complicated mosaic of color and design. The stiff-backed chairs and massive sofas were apparently committed for life to linen strait-jackets. Heavy velvet curtains shut out the light and a faint smell of coal soot permeated the air. Over the hall fireplace hung a large portrait of Madam Bartlett, just inside the drawing-room gleamed a marble bust of her, and two long pier-glasses kept repeating the image of her until she dominated every nook and corner of the place.

But Quin saw little of all this. To him the house was simply a background for images of Eleanor: Eleanor coming down the broad stairs in her blue and gray costume; Eleanor tripping through the hall in her Red Cross uniform; Eleanor standing in the doorway in the moonlight, telling him how wonderful he was.

He had written her exactly ten letters since her departure, but only two had been dispatched, and

by a fatal error these two were identical. After a superhuman effort to couch his burning thoughts in sufficiently cool terms, he had achieved a partially successful result; but, discovering after addressing the envelope that he had misspelled two words, he laboriously made another copy, addressed a second envelope, then inadvertently mailed both.

He had received such a scoffing note in reply that his ears tingled even now as he thought of it. It was only when he recalled the postscript that he found consolation. "How funny that you should get a position at Bartlett & Bangs's," she had written. "If you should happen to meet any member of my family, for heaven's sake don't mention my name. They might link you up with the Hawaiian Garden, or the trip to the camp that night grandmother was hurt. Just let our friendship be a little secret between you and me."

" 'You and me,' " Quin repeated the words softly to himself, as he stood there among the objects made sacred by her one-time presence.

"Madam Bartlett wishes you to come upstairs and explain the papers before she signs them," said a woman in nurse's uniform from the stair landing, and, cap in hand, Quin followed her up the steps.

At the open door of the large front room he paused. Lying in royal state in a huge four-poster bed was Madam Bartlett, resplendent in a purple robe, with her hair dressed in its usual elaborate

style, and in her ears pearls that, Quin afterward assured the Martels, looked like moth-balls.

"You go on out of here and stay until I ring for you," she snapped at the nurse; then she squinted her eyes and looked at Quin. She did not put on her eye-glasses; they were reserved for feminine audiences exclusively.

"What do they mean by sending me this jumble of stuff?" she demanded, indicating the papers strewn on the silk coverlid. "How do they expect me to know what they are all about?"

"They don't," said Quin reassuringly, coming forward; "they sent me to tell you."

"And who are you, pray?"

"I am Mr. Randolph's er—er—secretary."

For the life of him he could not get through it without a grin, and to his relief the old lady's lips also twitched.

"Much need he had for a secretary!" she said, then added shrewdly: "Are n't you the soldier that put the splint on my leg?"

Quin modestly acknowledged that he was.

"It was a mighty poor job," said Madam, "but I guess it was better than nothing."

"How 's the leg coming on?" inquired Quin affably.

"It 's not coming on at all," Madam said. "If I listen to those fool doctors it 's coming off."

Quin shook his head in emphatic disapproval.

"Don't you listen to 'em," he advised earnestly. "Doctors don't know everything! Why, they told a fellow out at the hospital that his arm would have to come off at the shoulder. He lit out over the hill, bath-robe and all, for his home town, and got six other doctors to sign a paper saying he did n't need an amputation. He got back in twenty-four hours, was tried for being A. W. O. L., and is serving his time in the prison ward to-day. But he 's still got his arm all right."

"Good for him!" said Madam heartily; then, recalling the business in hand, she added peevishly: "Well, stop talking now and explain these papers."

Quin went over them several times with great patience, and then held the ink-well while she tremblingly signed her name.

"Kinder awkward doing things on your back," he said sympathetically, as she sank back exhausted.

"Awkward? It 's torture. The cast is bad enough in itself; but having to lie in one position like this makes me sore all over."

"You don't have to tell me," said Quin, easing up the bed-clothes with quite a professional air; "I was six months on my back. But there 's no sense in keeping you like this. Why don't they rig you up a pulley, so 's you can change the position of your body without disturbing your leg?"

"How do you mean?"

"Like this," said Quin, taking a paper-knife and

a couple of spoons from the table and demonstrating his point.

Madam listened with close attention, and so absorbed were she and Quin that neither of them were conscious of Miss Isobel's entrance until they heard her feeble protest:

"I would not dare try anything like that without consulting Dr. Rawlins."

"Nobody wants you to dare anything," flared out her mother. "What the boy says sounds sensible. He says he has fixed them for the soldiers at the hospital. I want him to fix one for me."

"When shall I come?" Quin asked.

"Come nothing. You 'll stay and do it now. Telephone the factory that I am keeping you here for the morning. Isobel, order him whatever he needs. And now get out of here, both of you; I want to take a nap."

Thus it was that, an hour later, the new colored butler was carrying the papers back to Bartlett & Bangs's, and Mr. Randolph's new secretary was sawing wood in Madam Bartlett's cellar. It was a humble beginning, but he whistled jubilantly as he worked. Already he saw himself climbing, by brilliant and spectacular deeds, to a dazzling pinnacle of security in the family's esteem.

CHAPTER 11

MADAM BARTLETT'S accident had far-reaching results. For fifty years her firm hand had brooked no slightest interference with the family steering-wheel, and now that it was removed the household machinery came to a standstill. She who had "ridden the whirlwind and directed the storm" now found herself ignominiously laid low. Instead of rising with the dawn, primed for battle in club committee, business conclave, or family council, she lay on her back in a darkened room, a prisoner to pain. The only vent she had for her pent-up energy was in hourly tirades against her daughters for their inefficiency, the nurses for their incompetency, the doctors for their lack of skill, and the servants for their disobedience.

The one person who, in any particular, found favor with her these days was her son's new secretary. Every Saturday, when Quinby Graham stopped on his way to the bank with various papers for her to sign, he was plied with questions and intrusted with various commissions. A top sergeant was evidently just what Madam had been looking for all her life—one trained to receive orders and

execute them. All went well until one day when Quin refused to smuggle in some forbidden article of diet; then the steam-roller of her wrath promptly passed over him also.

He waited respectfully until her breath and vocabulary were alike exhausted, then said good-humoredly:

"I used to board with a woman up in Maine that had hysterics like that. They always made her feel a lot better. Don't you want me to shift that pulley a bit? You don't look comfortable."

Madam promptly ordered him out of the room. But next day she made an excuse to send for him, and actually laughed when he stepped briskly up to the bed, saluted smartly, and impudently asked her how her grouch was.

There was something in his very lack of reverence, in his impertinent assumption of equality, in his refusal to pay her the condescending homage due feebleness and old age, that seemed to flatter her.

"He 's a mule," she told Randolph—"a mule with horse sense."

Quin's change from khaki to civilian clothes affected him in more ways than one. Constitutionally he was opposed to saying "sir" to his fellow men; to standing at attention until he was recognized; to acknowledging, by word or gesture, that he was any one's inferior on this wide and democratic planet. He much preferred organizing to being

organized, leading to being led. Early in his military training he had evinced an inclination to take things into his own hands and act without authority. It was somewhat ironic that the very trait that had deprived him of a couple of bars on his shoulder should have put the medal on his breast.

But freedom from the restrictions of army life brought its penalties. He found that blunders condoned in a soldier were seriously criticized in a civilian; that the things he had been at such pains to learn in the past two years were of no apparent value to him now. It was a constant surprise to him that a plaid suit and three-dollar necktie should meet with less favor in the feminine eye than a dreary drab uniform.

About the first of March he was getting somewhat discouraged at his slow progress, when an incident happened that planted his feet firmly on the first rung of his social ladder.

Ever since their mother's accident, Miss Isobel and Miss Enid had stood appalled before their new responsibilities. They were like two trembling dead leaves that still cling to a shattered but sturdy old oak. What made matters worse was the absence of the faithful black Tom, who for years had served them by day and guarded them by night. They lived in constant fear of burglars, which grew into a veritable terror when some one broke into the pantry and rifled the shelves.

Quin heard about it when he arrived on Saturday morning, and as usual offered advice:

"What you need is a man in the house. Then you would n't be scared all the time."

"Well," said Madam, "what about you?"

Quin's face fell. He had no desire to exchange the noisy, wholesome family life of the Martels for the silent, somber grandeur of the Bartletts. His affections had taken root in the shabby little brown house that always seemed to be humming gaily to itself. When the piano was not being played, the violin or guitar was. There were bursts of laughter, snatches of song, and young people going and coming through doors that never stayed closed.

"You don't seem keen about the proposition," Madam commented dryly, smoothing the bed-clothes with her wrinkled fingers.

"Well, I can't say I am," Quin admitted. "You see, I 'm living with some friends out on Sixth Street. They are sort of kin-folks of yours, I believe—the Martels."

A carefully aimed hand grenade could have produced no more violent or immediate result. Madam damned the Martels, individually and collectively, and furiously disclaimed any relationship.

"They are a trifling, worthless lot!" she stormed. "I wish I 'd never heard of them. They fastened their talons on my son Bob, and ruined his life, and now they are doing all they can to ruin my grand-

daughter. Have n't you ever heard them speak of me?"

"Oh, yes," said Quin with laughing significance.

"What do they say?" Madam demanded instantly.

"You want it straight?"

"Yes."

"Well, Mr. Martel told me only last night that he thought you were an object of pity."

Madam's jaw relaxed in amazement.

"What on earth did he mean?" she asked.

"He said you 'd got 'most everything in life that he 'd missed, but he 'd hate to change places with you."

She lay perfectly still, staring at him with her small restless eyes, and when she spoke again it was to revert to the subject of burglars.

Quin was relieved. He had been skating on thin ice in discussing the Martels, for any moment might have brought up a question concerning Eleanor.

"I used to have a corporal that was an ex-burglar," he said, plunging into the new subject with alacrity. "First-rate fellow, too. Last I heard of him, he had a position as chauffeur with a rich old lady who lived alone up in Detroit. She had two burglar-alarm systems, but the joke of it was she made him sleep in the house for extra protection!"

"I suppose you are trying to frighten me off from engaging you?" Madam asked.

"Not exactly," Quin smiled. "Of course I 'll

come if you can't get anybody else. But there's no question of engaging me. If I come, I pay board."

Madam laughed aloud for the first time since her accident.

"Do you take me for a landlady?" she asked.

"Only when you take me for a night-watchman," said Quin.

They eyed each other steadily for a moment, then she held out her hand.

"We 'll compromise," she said. "No salary and no board. We 'll try it out for a week."

The next day Quin's suit-case, containing all his worldly possessions, was transferred from the small stuffy room over the Martels' kitchen to the large luxurious one over the Bartletts' dining-room. It was quite the grandest room he had ever occupied, with its massive walnut furniture and its heavily draped windows; but, had it been stripped bare but for a single picture, it would still have been a *chambre de luxe* to him. The moment he entered he discovered a photograph of Eleanor on the mantel, and ten minutes later, when Hannah tapped at the door to say that dinner was served, he was still standing with arms folded on the shelf in absorbed adoration.

That first meal with the Misses Bartlett was an ordeal he never forgot. Their formal aloofness and evident dismay at his presence were enough in them-

selves to embarrass him; but combined with the necessity of choosing the right knife and fork, of breaking his bread properly, and of removing his spoon from his coffee-cup, they were quite overpowering. During his two years in the army he had drifted into the easy habits and easier vernacular of the enlisted man. Whatever knowledge he had of the amenities of life had almost been forgotten. But, though his social virtues were few, he passionately identified himself with them rather than with his faults, which were many. To prove his politeness, for instance, he insisted upon his hostesses having second helps to every dish, offered to answer the telephone whenever it rang, and even obligingly started to answer the door-bell during the salad course.

That dinner was but the initiation into a week of difficult adjustments. When he was not in the arctic region surrounding Miss Isobel and Miss Enid, he was in the torrid zone of Madam's presence. New and embarrassing situations confronted him on every hand, and when he was not breaking conventions he was breaking china. But Quin was not sensitive, and, in spite of the fact that he was being silently or vocally condemned most of the time, he cheerfully persevered in his determination to win the respect of the family.

The saving of his ignorance was that he never tried to conceal it. He looked at it with surprise

and discussed it with disconcerting frankness. He was no more abashed in learning new and better ways of conducting himself than he would have been in learning a new language. He laughed good-humoredly at his mistakes and seldom committed the same one a second time. His limitations were to him like the frontier to a pioneer—a thing to be reached and crossed.

If only he could have contented himself with performing the one duty required of him and then gracefully effacing himself, his success would have been assured. But that was not Quin's nature. Having identified himself with the family, he promptly assumed full responsibility for its welfare. By the end of the second week he was the self-constituted head of the establishment. No mission was too high or too low for him to volunteer to perform. One moment he was tactfully severing diplomatic relations with a consulting physician in the front hall, the next he was firing the furnace in the basement. Whenever he was in the house he was meeting emergencies and adjusting difficulties, upsetting established customs and often achieving unexpected results with new ones.

Miss Isobel and Miss Enid stood aghast at his temerity, and waited hourly for the lightning of Madam's wrath to annihilate him. But, though the bolts rained about him, they failed to destroy him.

On one occasion Miss Isobel was so outraged by

his familiar attitude toward her mother that she plucked up courage to remonstrate with him; but Madam, instead of appreciating the interference on her behalf, promptly turned upon her defender.

"Now, Isobel," she said caustically, "*you* may be old enough to want men to respect you, but I am young enough to want them to like me. You leave young Graham alone."

Quin meanwhile, in spite of his arduous duties at the office and at home, was living in a world of dreams. The privilege of hearing Eleanor's name frequently mentioned, of getting bits of news of her from time to time, the exciting possibility of being under the same roof with her when she returned, supplied the days with thrilling zest. Since her teasing note in answer to his double-barreled communication, he had written but once and received no answer; but he knew that she was expected home for the Easter vacation, and he lived on that prospect.

One evening, when he was summoned to Madam's room to shorten her new crutches, he realized that the all-important subject was under discussion.

"Is n't that exactly like her?" Madam was saying. "Refusing to go in the first place, and now objecting to coming home."

"Well, it is n't especially gay for her here, is it?" Miss Enid ventured in feeble defense. "I am afraid we are rather dull company for a young girl."

"Well, make it gay," commanded Madam. "You and Isobel are n't so old and feeble that you can't think of some way to entertain young people."

"A tea?" suggested Miss Enid.

"A tea would never tempt Eleanor. She 's too much her mother's child to enjoy anything so staid and respectable."

"Why don't you give her a dance?" suggested Quin enthusiastically, looking up from his work.

"Give who a dance?" demanded Madam in surprise.

"Miss Eleanor," said Quin, bending over his work and blushing to the roots of his stubby hair.

The three ladies exchanged startled glances; then Miss Enid said:

"Of course. I had forgotten that you met her the night of the accident. I wonder if we *could* give the dear child a party?"

"It is not to be thought of," said Miss Isobel, "with no regular butler, and mother ill——"

"I tell you, I 'm *not* ill!" snapped Madam. "I intend to be up and about by Easter. I 'll give as many parties as I like. Hurry up with those crutches, Graham; do you think I am going to wait all night?"

One of Quin's first acts upon coming into the house had been to aid and abet Madam in her determination to use her injured leg. Dr. Rawlins

had infuriated her by his pessimistic warnings and his dark suggestions of a wheeled chair.

"We 'll show 'em what you can do when you get that cast off," Quin had reassured her with the utmost confidence. "I 've limbered up heaps of stiff legs for the fellows. It takes patience and grit. I got the patience and you got the grit, so there we are!"

Now that the cast was off, a few steps were attempted each night, during which painful operation Miss Enid fled to another room to shed tears of apprehension, while Miss Isobel hovered about the hall, ready to call the doctor if anything happened.

"Is that better?" he asked now, as he got Madam to her feet and carefully adjusted the crutches. "If you say they are too short, I 'll tell you what the little man said when he was teased about his legs. 'They reach the ground,' he said; 'what more can you ask?' "

"Shut up your nonsense, and mind what you are doing!" cried Madam. "My leg is worse than it was yesterday. I can't put my foot to the ground."

"Oh, yes, you can," Quin insisted, coaxing her from the bed-post to the dresser. "You are coming on fine. I never saw but one person do better. That was a guy I knew in France who never danced a step until he lost a leg, and then his cork leg taught his other leg to do the fox-trot."

"Did n't I tell you to hush!" commanded Madam,

laughing in spite of herself. "You will have me falling over here in a minute."

When she was back in her chair and Quin was leaving, she beckoned to him.

"What about Mr. Ranny?" she asked in an anxious whisper. "Was he at the office to-day?"

Quin had been dreading the question, but when it came he did not evade it. Randolph Bartlett's lapses from grace were coming with such alarming frequency that the sisters' frantic efforts to keep the truth from their mother only resulted in arousing her suspicion and making her more unhappy.

"No," said Quin; "he has n't been there for a week. He 's never going to be any better as long as he stays in the business. You don't know what he has to stand from Mr. Bangs."

"I know what Mr. Bangs has had to stand from him."

"Yes; but Mr. Ranny 's never mean. He is one of the kindest, nicest gentlemen I ever met up with. But he can't stand being nagged at all the time, and he feels that he don't count for anything. He says Mr. Bangs considers him a figurehead, and that he 'd rather be selling shoestrings for himself than be in partnership with him."

"Yes, and if I let him go that 's what he *would* be doing," said Madam bitterly.

"Mr. Chester don't think so," persisted Quin; "he says Mr. Ranny 's got a lot of ability."

"Don't quote that sissified Francis Chester to me. He may be a good man—I suppose he is; but I can't abide the sight of him. He goes around holding one hand in the other as if he were afraid he 'd spill it! What did you say he said about Ranny?"

"He said he had ability; that if he was on his own in the country some place——"

"'On his own'!" Madam's contempt was great. "He has n't *got* any own. He 's just like the girls—no force or decision about any of them. Their father was n't like that; I am sure *I 'm* not. What 's the matter with them, anyhow?"

Quin looked her straight in the eyes. "Do you want to know, honest?"

Disconcerting as it was to have an oratorical question taken literally, Madam's curiosity prompted her to nod her head.

"The same thing 's the matter with them," said Quin, with brutal frankness, "that 's the matter with your leg. They 've been broken and kept in the cast too long."

Then, before he could get the berating he surely deserved, he was off down the stairs, disturbing the silence of the house with his cheerful whistle.

At breakfast the next morning he scented trouble. Until now he had made little headway with the two sisters, having been too much occupied in storming the fortress of Madam's regard to concern himself with the outlying districts. But this morning he

met with an even colder reception than usual. In vain he fired off his best jokes: Miss Enid remained pale and languid, and Miss Isobel presided over the coffee-pot as if it had been a funeral urn. A crisis was evidently pending, and he determined to meet it half way.

"Is Queen Vic mad at me?" he asked suddenly, leaning forward on his folded arms and smiling with engaging candor.

Miss Isobel started to pour the cream into the sugar-bowl, but caught herself in the act.

"If you mean my mother," she said with reproving dignity, "she has asked me to tell you—that is, we all think it best——"

"For me to go?" Quin finished it for her. "Now, look here, Miss Isobel; you can fire me, but you know you can't fire the furnace! Who is going to stay here at night? Who is going to carry Madam up and down stairs? Of course I don't want to butt in, but if ever a house needed a man it 's this one. Why don't you have me stay on until things get to running easy again?"

There was an embarrassing pause during which Miss Isobel fidgeted with the cups and saucers and Miss Enid bit her lips nervously.

"Don't you-all like me?" persisted Quin with his terrible directness.

Now, Miss Isobel had spent her life in evasions and reservations and compromises. To have even

a personal liking stripped thus in public offended her maiden modesty, and she scurried to the cover of silence.

"Of course we like you," murmured Miss Enid, coming to her rescue. "We like you very much, Mr. Graham, and we appreciate your kindness in coming to help us out. But mother feels that we should n't impose on your good nature any longer."

Quin shook his impatient head.

"That 's not it," he said. "She 's mad at something I said last night, and she 's got a right to be. It was true all right, but it was none of my business. I made up my mind before I went to bed that I was going to apologize. I can fix things up with her. It 's you and Miss Isobel I can't understand. You say you like me, but you don't act like it. I know I make mistakes about lots of things, and that I do things wrong and say things I ought n't to. But all you got to do is to call me down. I want to help you; but that 's not all—I want to learn the game. When a fellow has knocked around with men since he was a kid——"

He broke off suddenly and stared into his coffee-cup.

"I think he might go up and speak to mother, don't you, Isobel?" asked Miss Enid tentatively.

Quin pushed back his chair and rose precipitately from the table, dragging the cloth away as he did so.

"That 's not the point!" he said heatedly. "It 's

for you two to decide, as well as her. Do you want me to go or to stay?"

Miss Isobel and Miss Enid, who had been assuring each other almost hourly that they could not stand that awful boy in the house another day, looked at each other intercedingly.

"It would be a great help if you could stay at least until mother learns to use her crutches," urged Miss Enid.

"Yes, and until we get some one we can trust to stay with us at night," added Miss Isobel.

"I 'll stay as long as you like!" said Quin heartily; and he departed to make his peace with Madam.

CHAPTER 12

FROM that time on Quin's status in the family became less anomalous. To be sure, he was still Mr. Randolph's private secretary, Madam's top sergeant, Miss Isobel's and Miss Enid's body-guard, and the household's general-utility man; but he was now something else in addition. Miss Isobel had discovered, quite by chance, that he was the grandson of Dr. Ezra Quinby, whose book "Christianizing China" had been one of the inspirations of her girlhood.

"And to think we considered asking him to eat in the pantry!" she exclaimed in horror to her sister.

"Well, I told you all along he was a gentleman by instinct," said Miss Enid.

To be sure, they were constantly shocked by his manners and his frank method of speech, but they were also exhilarated. He was like a disturbing but refreshing breeze that swept through their quiet, ordered lives. He talked about things and places they had never heard of or seen, and recounted his experiences with an enthusiasm that was contagious.

As for Quin, he found, to his surprise, that he was enjoying his new quarters quite as much as he

had the old ones. Madam was a never-ending source of amusement and interest to him, and Miss Isobel and Miss Enid soon had each her individual appeal. He liked the swish of their silk petticoats, and the play of their slim white hands about the coffee-tray. He liked their super-feminine delicacies of speech and motion, and the flattering interest they began to take in all his affairs.

Miss Isobel developed a palpitating concern for his spiritual welfare and invited him to go to church with her. She even introduced him to the minister with proud reference to his distinguished grandfather, and basked in the reflected glory.

Quin did not take kindly to church. He considered that he had done his full duty by it in the first fourteen years of his life, when he, along with the regenerate heathen, had been forced to attend five services every Sunday in the gloomy chapel in the compound at Nanking. But if Eleanor's aunt had asked him to accompany her to the gates of hell instead of the portals of heaven, he would have acquiesced eagerly. So strenuously did he lift his voice in the familiar hymns of his youth that he was promptly urged to join the choir, an ordeal whose boredom was mitigated only during the few moments when the collection was taken up and he and the tenor could bet on which deacon would make his round first.

Not for years had Miss Isobel had such thrilling

occupation as that of returning Ezra Quinby's grandson to the spiritual fold. In spite of the fact that Quin was a fairly decent chap already, whose worst vices were poker and profanity, she persisted in regarding him as a brand which she had been privileged to snatch from the burning.

What gave him a yet more intimate claim upon her was the fact that his heart and lungs were still troublesome, and with any over-exertion on his part, or a sudden change in the weather, his chest became very sore and his racking cough returned. At such times Miss Isobel was in her glory. She would put him to bed with hot-water bottles and mustard plasters and feed him hot lemonade. Quin took kindly to the coddling. No one had fussed over him like that since his mother died, and he was touchingly grateful.

"Say, you 'd be a wonder out at the hospital," he said to her on one of these occasions. "I wish some of those fellows with the flu could have you to look after them."

Miss Isobel's long, sallow face with its dark-ringed eyes lit up for a moment.

"There is nothing I should like better," she said. "But of course it 's out of the question."

"Why?"

"Mother does n't approve of us doing any work at the camp. She did make an exception in the case of my niece, but Eleanor was so insistent. Sister

and I try never to oppose mother's wishes. It cuts us off from a great many things; but then, I contend that our first duty is to her."

Miss Isobel's attitude toward her mother was that of a monk to his haircloth shirt. She acquired so much merit in her friends' eyes and in her own by her patient endurance that the penance was robbed of half its sting.

"Things are awful bad out at the hospital now," went on Quin. "A fellow was telling me yesterday that in some of the wards they only have one nurse to two hundred patients. The epidemic is getting worse every day. You-all in town here don't know what it 's like where there 's so many sick and so few to take care of 'em."

Miss Isobel, with morbid interest, insisted upon the details. When Quin had finished his grim recital, she turned to him with scared determination.

"Do you know," she fluttered, "I almost feel as if I ought to go in spite of mother's wishes."

"Of course you ought," Quin conceded, "especially when you are keeping a trained nurse here in the house who does n't do a thing but carry up trays and sit around and look at herself!"

"I know it," Miss Isobel admitted miserably. "I 've lain awake nights worrying over it. Sister and I are perfectly able to do what is to be done. But mother insists upon keeping the nurse."

"Well, she can't keep you, if you really want to go. I guess you got a right to do your duty."

The word was like a bugle call to Miss Isobel. She went about all day in a tremor of uncertainty, and at last yielded to Quin's insistence, and, donning Eleanor's Red Cross uniform, accompanied him to the hospital.

Every afternoon after that, when Madam was taking her rest, Miss Isobel, feeling like Machiavelli one moment and Florence Nightingale the next, stepped into the carriage, already loaded with delicacies, and proceeded on her errand of mercy. She invariably returned in a twitter of subdued excitement, and recounted her experiences with breathless interest at the dinner-table.

"I 've never seen sister like this before," Miss Enid told Quin. "She talks more in an hour now than she used to talk in a week, and she seems so happy."

The change wrought in Miss Isobel's life by Quin's advent into the family was mild, however, compared to the cataclysm effected in the life of her sister. Miss Enid, having had her own affections wrecked in early youth, spent her time acting as a sort of salvage corps following the devastation caused by her cyclonic mother. When Madam shattered things to bits, Miss Enid tried patiently to remold them nearer to the heart's desire. She had acquired a habit of offsetting every disagreeable

remark by an agreeable one, and she was apt to see incipient halos hovering above heads where less sympathetic observers saw horns. When the last chance of getting rid of the disturbing but helpful Quin vanished, she set herself to work to discover his possibilities with the view of undertaking his social reclamation.

One evening, as he was passing through the hall, she called him into the library. It was a small, high-ceilinged room, with bookcases reaching to the ceiling, and a massive mahogany table bearing a reading-lamp with two green shades. Lincoln and his Cabinet held session over one door, and Andrew Jackson, surrounded by his weeping family, died over the other. Miss Enid, with books piled up in front of her, was sitting at the table.

"Quinby," she said,—it had been "Quinby" ever since the discovery of his grandfather,—"I wonder if you can help me? I have a club paper on the 14th, and I can't find a thing about my subject. Can't you tell me something about the position of women in China?"

Quin, who had come in expecting to be called upon to put up a window or fix the electric light, looked at her blankly. Under ordinary circumstances he would have laughingly disclaimed any knowledge of the subject; but with Miss Enid sitting there looking up at him with such flattering confidence, it was different. Out of the dusty pigeon holes of his

brain he dragged odds and ends of information, memories of the native houses, the customs and manners of the people, stories he had heard from his Chinese nurses, street incidents he had seen, stray impressions picked up here and there by a lively active American boy in a foreign city.

"I ought to be able to tell you a lot more," he said apologetically in conclusion. "I could if I was n't such a bonehead."

"But you 've given me just what I wanted!" cried Miss Enid. "And you 've made it all so *vivid*. It takes a very good mind to register details like that and to be able to present them in such good order."

Quin looked at her quizzically. He was confident enough of his abilities along other lines, but he had a low opinion of his mental equipment.

"I guess the only kind of sense I got is common," he said.

But Miss Enid would not have it so. "No," she said, earnestly regarding the toe of her beaded slipper; "your mind is much above the average. But it is n't enough to be born with brains—one must know how to use them."

"I suppose you mean I don't?" asked Quin, also regarding the beaded slipper.

"Nobody does who has had no training," Miss Enid gently suggested. "It seems a pity that a young man of your possibilities should have had so little opportunity for cultivating them."

"Well, I ain't a Methuselah!" said Quin, slightly peaked. "What's the matter with me beginning now?"

"It's rather late, I am afraid. Still, other men have done it. I wonder if you would consider taking up some night courses at the university?"

"I'd consider anything that would get me on in the world. I've got a very particular reason, Miss Enid, for—for wanting to get on."

She looked at him with increased interest.

"Really? How interesting! You must tell me all about it some day. But this would keep you back for a time. You would have to give all your spare hours to study, and you might not even be able to take the better position they promised you at the factory this spring."

"I've already got it," Quin said. "Mr. Bangs told me to-day that I was to start in as shipping clerk Monday morning. But he'd let me off nights if I'd put it up to him. Old Chester says——"

Miss Enid's Pre-Raphaelite brows contracted slightly. "Don't you think it would be more respectful——"

"Sure," agreed Quin; "I didn't mean any harm. I like Mr. Chester. He asked me to come up to his rooms some night and see his collection of flutes."

"That was like him," Miss Enid said warmly. "He's always doing kind things like that. I know his reputation for being diffident and hard to get

acquainted with, but once you get beneath the surface——"

Quin was not in the least interested in Mr. Chester's surface. He sat on the edge of the table, swinging his foot and staring off into space, wholly absorbed in the idea of cultivating that newly discovered intellect of his.

"Say, Miss Enid," he said, impulsively interrupting her eulogy of Mr. Chester's neglected virtues, "I wish you 'd sort of take me in hand. *You* know what I need better than I do. If you 'll get a line on that school business, I 'll start right in, if I have to start in the kindergarten. Hand out the dope and I 'll take it. And whenever you see me doing things wrong, or saying things wrong, I 'd take it as a favor if you 'd jack me up."

Miss Enid smiled ruefully. "Why, Quinby, that is just what we have all been doing ever since you came. If you were n't the best-natured——"

"Not a bit of it," disclaimed Quin. "Queen Vic lets me have it in the neck sometimes, but that 's nothing. I 've learned more since I 've been in this house than I ever learned in all my life put together. Why, sometimes I don't hardly know myself!"

"Two negatives, Quinby, make an affirmative," suggested Miss Enid primly; and thus his higher education began.

Miss Enid was right when she said his mind was above the average. Its one claim to superiority lay

in the fact that it had received the little training it had at first hand. What he knew of geography he knew, not from maps, but from actual observation in many parts of the world. Higher mathematics were unknown to him, but through years of experience he had learned to solve the most difficult of all problems—that of making ends meet. He had learned astronomy from a Norwegian sailor, as they lay on the deck of a Pacific transport night after night in the southern seas. He had even tackled literature during his six months in hospital, when he had plowed through all the books the wards provided from Dante's "Inferno" to "Dere Mable."

Soon after his talk with Miss Enid he decided to call upon Mr. Chester, not because Mr. Chester was an enlivening companion, but because he was so touchingly grateful for the casual friendship that Quin bestowed upon him.

"He 's so sort of lonesome," Quin told Miss Leaks. "When he looks at me with those big dog eyes of his, I feel like scratching him back of his ear."

Mr. Chester, in his small but tastefully furnished bachelor apartment, outdid himself in his efforts to be hospitable. He insisted upon Quin taking the best chair, gave him a good cigar, showed him some rare first editions, displayed his collection of musical instruments, and struggled valiantly to establish a common footing. But there was only one subject

upon which they could find anything to say, and they came back again and again to the affairs of the Bartlett family.

"Why don't you ever come around and see the folks?" Quin asked hospitably. "They get awful lonesome with so few people dropping in."

Mr. Chester in evident embarrassment flicked the ash from his cigar and answered guardedly:

"I used to be there a great deal in the old days. Unfortunately, Madam Bartlett and I had a misunderstanding. As a matter of fact, I have not crossed that threshold in—let me see—it must be fifteen years! It was a party, I remember, given for Eleanor, the little granddaughter, on her fifth birthday."

"Oh, yes!" said Quin, finding Mr. Chester for the first time interesting. "They 've got a picture of her taken with Miss Enid in her party dress."

"I suppose you mean this?" Mr. Chester reached over and took from his desk a somewhat faded photograph, in a silver frame, of a little girl leaning against a big girl's shoulders, both enveloped in a cloud of white tulle.

"Gee, but she was pretty!" exclaimed Quin, devouring every detail of Eleanor's chubby features.

"A beautiful woman," sighed Mr. Chester—and Quin, looking up suddenly, surprised a look in his host's eyes that was anything but numerical.

Obligingly relinquishing his application of the pronoun for Mr. Chester's, he said:

"She certainly thinks a lot of you!"

"How do you know?" demanded Mr. Chester.

"From the way she talks. She says people are barking up the wrong tree when they think you are cold and indifferent and all that; says you 've got one of the noblest natures *she* ever knew."

Quin was appalled at the effect of these words. Mr. Chester's eyes got quite red around the rims and his lips actually trembled.

"Poor Enid!" he said. Then he remembered himself, or rather forgot himself, and became a Number Nine again, and bored Quin talking business until ten o'clock.

At parting they shook hands cordially, and Mr. Chester urged him to come again.

"I wonder if you would care to use one of my tickets for the Symphony Orchestra next week?" he asked.

Quin looked embarrassed. He had accepted a similar invitation the week before, and had confided to Rose Martel afterward that he "never heard such a bully band playing such bum music." But Mr. Chester's intention was so kind that he could run no risk of offending him.

"I 'll go if I can," he said, leaving himself a loophole.

"Here is the ticket," said Mr. Chester, "and in

case you do not use it, perhaps you will so good as to pass it on to some one who can."

This suggestion afforded Quin an inspiration.

"Say, Miss Enid," he said the next morning at breakfast. "I want to give you a ticket to the Symphony Orchestra next Friday night. Will you go?"

"But, my dear boy," she protested greatly touched, "I cannot go by myself."

"You don't have to. I 'm going to take you and come for you. You ain't going to turn me down, are you?"

"Have you got the ticket?"

"Right here. Now you will go, won't you?"

It would have taken a less susceptible heart than Miss Enid's to resist Quin's persuasive tones, and in spite of Miss Isobel's disapprobation she agreed to go.

Just what happened on that opening night of the Fine Arts Series, when two old lovers found themselves in embarrassing proximity for the first time in fifteen years, has never been told. But from subsequent events it is safe to conclude that during the long program they became much more interested in their own unfinished symphony than in Schubert's, and when Quin came to take Miss Enid home, he found them in a corner of the lobby, still so engrossed in conversation that he obligingly walked around the block to give them an additional five minutes.

CHAPTER 13

QUIN'S desire for self-improvement soon became an obsession. With Miss Enid's assistance he got into a night course at the university, and proceeded to attack his ignorance with something of the fierce determination he had attacked the Hun the year before in France. He plunged through bogs of history, got hopelessly entangled in the barbed wire of mathematics, had hand-to-hand struggles with belligerent parts of speech, and more than once suffered the shell-shock of despair. But his watchword now, as then, was, "Up and at 'em!" And before long he had the satisfaction of seeing his enemy gradually giving way.

Having taken his small public into his confidence in regard to his belated ambition to get an education, he was surprised to find how ready everybody was to help him. Mr. Chester not only assisted him with his mathematics, but insisted upon taking him to hear good music, in the vain effort to reclaim an ear hoplessly attuned to jazz and rag-time. Mr. Martel devoted Sunday afternoons to making him read aloud from the classics, with great attention to precise enunciation. Miss Isobel still looked after

his moral welfare, and Miss Enid continued to devote herself to his social improvement. But it remained for Madam Bartlett to render him the service of which he was most in need. Whenever the bubble of his self-esteem threatened to carry him away, she always took pains to puncture it.

"Don't let them make a fool of you, Graham," she said one day, as she leaned heavily upon his arm in a painful effort to walk without her crutches—an experiment that she allowed neither one of her daughters to share, as they invariably limped with her and got frightened when she stumbled. "They all treat you like a puppy that has learned to walk on its hind legs. Remember that you belong on your hind legs. You are only doing what most boys in your position do in their teens. If you were as smart as they claim, you would have got an education long ago. But young people these days have no sense! Just look at my granddaughter, for instance."

There being no direction in which he was more eager to look, Quin gave her his undivided attention.

"I 've spent thousands of dollars on that girl's education," Madam continued, "and what do you suppose she elected to specialize in? 'Expression'! In my day they called it elocution. When a girl was too dumb to learn anything else, the teacher got money out of her parents by teaching her to swing her arms around her hear and say, 'Curfew Shall

Not Ring To-night.' Now they all want to write poetry, or play the flute, or go on the stage, or some other fool thing like that."

"What about those that want to go on a farm? That 's sensible enough for you." Quin could n't resist the thrust on behalf of Mr. Ranny.

"It 's sensible for a sensible person," Madam said crossly. "It 's where *you* belong, instead of attempting all this university business."

There were times these days when Quin quite agreed with Madam. When the tide of his confidence was out, he regarded himself as a hopeless fool and despaired of ever making up the years he had lost. But at high tide there was no limit to his aspirations, nor to his courage. While his struggles at the university kept him humble, his success at the factory constantly elated him. Having achieved two promotions in less than three months, he already saw himself a prospective member of the firm. In fact, he slightly anticipated this event by flinging himself into the affairs of Bartlett & Bangs with even more ardor than was advisable. Hardly a day passed that he did not seek a chance to apprise Mr. Bangs of some colossal scheme or startling innovation that would revolutionize the business.

"See here, young man," said Mr. Bangs, when this had occurred once too often; "I pay you to work for me, not to think for me."

"But they are the same thing," urged Quin, with

appalling temerity. "Why, I can't sleep nights for thinking how other firms are walking away with our business. Smith & Snelling, up in Illinois, have got a plant that 's half as big as ours, and they export twice as much stuff as we do. And their plows can't touch ours; they ain't in a thousand miles of 'em."

"How do you know?"

"I 've seen 'em both in action, and I 've heard men talk about 'em. Why, if we could get a start in the Orient, and open up an agency in Japan and China——"

"There—that will do," said Mr. Bangs testily; "you get back to your work. You talk too much."

Both Mr. Ranny and Mr. Chester warned Quin again and again that he was not supposed to emerge from the obscurity of his humble position as shipping clerk. But Quin was the descendant of a long line of missionaries whose duty it was to reform. The effect of his heredity and early environment was not only to increase his self-reliance and intensify his motive power, but to commit him to ideals as well. Once he recognized a condition as being capable of improvement, he could not rest until he had tried to better it.

It was not until the approach of Easter that his mind began to stray from the highroads of industry and learning into the byways of pleasure. From certain signs about the Bartlett house it was apparent that preparations were in progress for an event of

importance. Paperhangers and cleaners came and went, consultations were held daily concerning new rugs and curtains. Miss Enid and Miss Isobel gave tentative orders and Madam promptly countermanded them. Workmen were engaged and dismissed and reëngaged. The door to the room at the head of the stairs, which he knew to be Eleanor's, now stood open, revealing a pink-and-white bower. Stray remarks now and then concerning caterers and music and invitations further excited his fancy, and he waited impatiently for the time when he should be formally apprised of Eleanor's home-coming.

Never before in his life had he been so inordinately happy. He burst into song at strange times and places, and had to be spoken to more than once for whistling in the office. Instead of studying at night, he frequently lapsed into delectable reveries in which he anticipated the bliss of being under the same roof with Eleanor. He already heard himself telling her about his promotions, his work at the university, his capture of her family. And always he pictured her as listening to him as she had that day at the Hawaiian Garden, with lips ready to smile or tremble and eyes that sparkled like little pools of water in the sunlight.

Occasionally reason suggested that she would be at home very little and that the obnoxious Phipps would be lying in wait for her whenever she went abroad. But Phipps was forbidden the house, and

with such a handicap as that he surely was out of the running. Besides, Miss Eleanor had probably forgotten all about the Captain by this time! Thus reassuring himself, the fatuous Quin loosened the reins of his fancy and rode full tilt for an inevitable fall.

The first intimation of it came the week before Easter, when Madam presented him with a handsome watch in recognition of his services. The gift itself was sufficiently overwhelming, but the formal politeness of the presentation sounded ominous. Madam suggested almost tactfully, in conclusion, that, now she was on her feet again, he need not feel obligated to remain longer.

"But I *don't* feel obligated!" he burst out impetuously. "I 'd rather stay here than anywhere in the world."

"Well, you can't stay," said Madam, whose small stock of courtesy had been exhausted on her initial speech. "My granddaughter is bringing some girls home with her for the Easter vacation, and I need your room."

"But I 'll sleep in the third story," urged Quin wildly. "You can billet me any old place—I don't care *where* you put me."

"No," said Madam firmly. "It's best for you to go."

That night at dinner the sisters did what they could to soften the blow for Quin. They gave vague

excuses that did not excuse, and explanations that did not explain.

"Of course, we have no idea of losing sight of you," Miss Enid said with forced brightness. "You must drop in often to tell us how you are getting along and to make mother laugh. You are the only person I know who can do that."

"Yes, and we shall count on you to come to supper every Sunday evening," Miss Isobel added; "then we can go to church together."

"Next Sunday?" asked Quin, faintly hopeful.

"Well, no," said Miss Isobel. "For the next two weeks we shall be occupied with the young ladies and their friends; but after that we shall look for you."

Quin looked at the two gentle sisters in dumb amazement. How *could* they sit there saying such kind things to him, and at the same time shut the door between him and the great opportunity of his life? What did it all mean? Where had he failed? Surely there was some terrible misunderstanding! In his complete bewilderment he created quite the most dreadful blunder that is registered against him in his long list of social sins.

"But don't you expect me to meet the young ladies?" he blurted out indignantly. "Are n't you going to ask me to the party?"

A horrible pause followed, during which the walls seemed to rock around him and he felt the blood

surging to his head. He was starting up from the table when Miss Enid laid a quieting hand on his sleeve.

"Of course you are to be invited, Quinby," she said in her suavest tones; "the invitation will reach you to-morrow."

CHAPTER 14

ON the night of the Bartlett party, Quin stood before the small mirror of his old room over the Martels' kitchen and surveyed himself in sections. The first view, obtained by standing on a chair, was the least satisfactory; for, in spite of the most correct of wing-toed dancing-shoes, there was a space between them and the cuffs of his trousers that no amount of adjustment could diminish. The second section was far more reassuring. Having amassed what to him seemed a fortune, for the purchase of a dress-suit, Quin had allowed himself to be persuaded by the voluble and omniscient salesman to put all of his money into a resplendent dinner-coat instead. The claim for the coat that it was "the classiest garment in the city" was reinforced by the fact that it had adorned the dummy in the shop window for seven consecutive days and occasioned much comment by its numerous "novelties." Quin had no doubts whatever about the coat. Its glory not only dimmed his eyes to the shortcomings of the trousers, which he had rented for the occasion, but even made him forget the aching tooth that had been harassing him all day.

As he went down to present himself for the family inspection, it is useless to deny that he was very much impressed with the elegance and correctness of his costume. It had been achieved with infinite pains and considerable expense. Nothing was lacking, not even a silver cigarette-case, bearing an unknown monogram, which he had purchased at a pawn-shop the day before.

His advent into the sitting-room produced a gratifying sensation.

"Ha! Who comes here!" cried Mr. Martel. "The glass of fashion and the mould of form." Then he came forward for close inspection. "Had n't you any better studs than those, my boy?"

"They are the ones that came in the shirt," said Quin, instantly on the defensive.

"Well, they hardly do justice to the occasion. Step upstairs, Cassius, and get my pearl ones out of the top chiffonier drawer."

"I wish Captain Phipps could see you," said Rose admiringly. "You should have seen his face when I told him you were going to-night! He was n't invited, you know."

"Where did you see him?" Quin asked, brushing a speck of lint from the toe of his shining shoe.

"Here. He 's been coming twice a week to work with Papa Claude ever since you left. Give 'em to me, Cass"—this to her brother. "I 'll put them in."

"Are n't they too little for the buttonholes?" asked Quin anxiously.

"Not enough to matter," Rose insisted. Then, as she finished, she added in a whisper: "Tell Nell somebody sent his love."

"Nothing doing," laughed Quin with a superior shrug; "somebody else is taking his."

The curb was lined with automobiles by the time he arrived at the Bartletts'. The house looked strangely unfamiliar with its blaze of lights and throng of arriving guests. He instinctively felt in his pocket for his latch-key, and then remembered, and waited for the strange butler to open the door. The inside of the house looked even less natural than the outside. The floors were cleared for dancing and the mantels were banked high with flowers and ferns. Under the steps the musicians were already tuning their instruments.

"Upstairs, sir; first room to your left," said the important person at the door, and Quin followed the stream of black-coated figures who were filing up the stairs and turning into the room he had occupied a short week ago. It was just as he had left it, except for the picture that no longer adorned the mantel.

"Beg pardon, sir," said the lofty attendant who took his overcoat, "your stud 's come loose."

"I bet the damn thing 's going to do that all

night," Quin said confidentially. "Say, you have n't got a pin, have you?"

"Oh, no, sir, it could n't be pinned," protested the man in a shocked tone.

Quin adjusted it as best he could, took a final look at himself in the mirror, and proceeded downstairs. Arrived in the lower hall, he glanced about him in some perplexity. Not a member of the family was visible, and he looked in vain for a familiar face. In his uncertainty as to his next move, he went back to the pantry and got himself a glass of water.

As he was returning to the hall, some one plucked at his sleeve and whispered:

"Hello there, Graham!"

Turning around, he encountered the gaping mouth of a shining saxophone, behind which beamed the no less shining countenance of Barney McGinness.

Barney had been in the 105th Infantry Band, and he and Quin had returned from France on the same transport. They exchanged hearty greetings under their breath.

"Serving here to-night, are you?" asked Barney.

"Serving?" repeated Quin; then he laughed good-naturedly. "You got another guess coming your way, Barney."

"So it 's the parlor instid of the pantry, is it? I 'd 'a' seen it for meself if I had used me eyes instead of me mouth. You look grand enough to be doing a turn on the vawdyville."

Quin tried not to expand his chest in pride, for fear the movement would disturb those temperamental studs. He would fain have lingered indefinitely in the warmth of Barney's admiring smile, but the signal for the first dance was already given, and he moved nervously out into the throng again.

Now that the moment had come for him to meet Eleanor—the moment he had longed for by day and dreamed of by night,—he found himself overcome with terrible diffidence. Suppose she did not want to see him again? Suppose she should be angry at him for coming to her party? Suppose she should be too taken up with all these strange friends of hers to have time to dance with him?

After obstructing social traffic in the hall for several moments, he encountered Miss Enid. She was all a lavender flutter, with sleeves floating and scarf dangling, and she wore an air of subdued excitement that made her almost pretty.

"Why, Quinby!" she said, and her eyes swept him. "Have you spoken to mother yet?"

"No; where is she?"

"In the library. And sister will present you to the young ladies in the parlor."

She hesitated a moment, then she placed a timid hand on Quin's arm.

"But before you go in would you mind doing something for me? Will you watch the front door

and let me know as soon as Mr. Chester arrives?"

"Mr. Chester?"

"Yes. You see, it 's been a great many years since he came to the house, and I want to—to make sure that he is properly welcomed."

"I 'll wait for him," said Quin, glad of any excuse for not entering that crowded parlor.

Lovely young creatures in rainbow tints drifted down the stairs and disappeared beyond the portières; supercilious young men, all in tail coats and most of them wearing white gloves, passed and repassed him.

Quin was experiencing the wholly new sensation of timidity. In vain he sought reassuring reflections from the long pier-glass, as he did guard duty in the front hall pending Mr. Chester's arrival. He 'd be all right, he assured himself, as soon as he got to know some of the people. Once he had spoken to Eleanor and been sure of her welcome, he did n't care what happened. Meanwhile he worked with his shirt-stud and tried not to think about his tooth.

It was late when Mr. Chester arrived, and by the time he had been placed in Miss Enid's care the receiving line in the parlor had dissolved and the dance was in full swing.

Quin made his way back to the library and presented his belated respects to Madam, who sat enthroned in state where she could command the field and direct the manœuvers. She was resplendent in

black velvet and old lace. A glittering comb topped her high white pompadour, and a dog-collar of diamonds encircled her wrinkled neck.

"Well, I am glad one man has the manners to come and speak to his hostess!" she said grimly, extending her hand to Quin. "The young lords of the present day seem to consider a lady's house a public dance-hall. Sit down and talk to me."

Quin did n't wish to sit down. He wished very ardently to plunge into that dancing throng and find Eleanor. But the old lady's vise-like grip closed on him, and he had to content himself with watching the couples circle past the door while he listened to a tirade against present-day customs.

"Why, this dancing is indecent!" stormed the old lady. "I never saw anything like it in my life! Look at that little Morris chit with her cheek plastered up to Johnnie Rawlins'! If somebody does n't speak to her, I will! I will not have such dancing in my house! And there 's Kitty Carey, the one with no back to her dress. What her mother is thinking of— Mercy! Look at the length of that skirt!"

It was not until Mr. and Mrs. Ranny arrived, and Madam had no time for any one else, that Quin was able to escape.

"Can you tell me where I can find Miss Eleanor?" he asked eagerly of Miss Isobel, whom he encountered in the back hall.

Miss Isobel, looking thoroughly uncomfortable in

a high-necked, long-sleeved evening dress, sighed anxiously:

"I am looking for her myself. She has had all the windows opened, and mother gave express orders that they were to be kept closed. Would you mind putting this one down? It makes such a draught."

It was a high window and an obstinate one, and by the time it was down Quin's cuffs were six inches beyond his coat sleeves and his vest was bulging.

"I don't want that window down," said a spirited voice behind him. "I wish you had left it alone."

"Eleanor!" said Miss Isobel reprovingly. "He is doing it at my request. It is our young friend Quinby Graham."

Quin wheeled about in dismay, and found himself face to face with a slender vision in shimmering blue and silver, a vision with flushed cheeks and angry eyes, who looked at him in blank amazement, then burst out laughing.

"Why, for mercy sakes! I never would have known you. You look so—so different in civilian clothes."

The words were what he had expected, but the intonation was not. It seemed to call for some sort of explanation.

"It 's my face," he blurted out apologetically, drawing attention to the fact that of all others he most wished to ignore. "Had an abscess in my tooth; it 's swelled my jaw up a bit."

Eleanor was not in the least concerned with his affliction. A civilian with the toothache could not expect the consideration of a hero with a shrapnel wound. Moreover, this was her first appearance in the rôle of hostess at a large party, and she fluttered about like a distracted humming-bird.

Miss Isobel laid a detaining hand on her bare shoulder.

"Did you know they were smoking in the dining-room, Nellie? Even some of the *girls* are smoking. If mother finds it out I don't know *what* she will do!"

"Call out the fire department, probably," said Eleanor flippantly.

"But listen! She will speak to them—you know she will. Don't you think you can stop them?"

"Of course I can't!" declared Eleanor, her anger rekindling. "And we can't dance with the windows down, either. Oh, dear, I wish we 'd never *tried* to give a party!"

"May I have the next dance, Miss Eleanor?" Quin ventured at this inopportune moment.

She turned upon him a perturbed face. "It 's taken," she said absently. "They are all taken until after supper. I 'll give you one then." And with this casual promise she hurried away.

Quin wandered disconsolately into the hall again. Everybody seemed to know everybody else. Apparently he was the one outsider. At the soldier dances

to which he was accustomed, he was used to boldly asking any girl on the floor to dance, sure of a welcoming smile. But here it was different. It seemed that a fellow must wait for an introduction which nobody took the trouble to give. He leaned against the door-jamb and indulged in bitter reflections. Much that bunch cared whether he had risked his life for his country or not! The girls had already forgotten which were the heroes and which were the slackers. He did n't care! All he had come for, anyhow, was to see Eleanor Bartlett. Just wait until he got her all to himself in that dance after supper——

Finding the strain of being a spectator instead of a participant no longer endurable, he wandered upstairs and bathed his face. The pain was getting worse and he had a horrible suspicion that the swelling was increasing. In the men's dressing-room he found a game of craps in progress, and, upon being asked to join, was so grateful for being included in any group that he accepted gladly, and for half an hour forgot his woes while he won enough to repay Cass the sum he had advanced on the dress-shirt.

"Stud 's undone, old chap," said his opponent as he paid his debt.

"Thanks, so it is," said Quin nonchalantly.

As he went downstairs he encountered Miss Enid and Mr. Chester sitting under the palms on the landing in intimate tête-à-tête.

"Will you dance this with me, Miss Enid?" asked Quin, leading a forlorn hope.

"I am afraid I don't know those new dances," said Miss Enid evasively, "the only thing I can do is to waltz."

"You mean a one-step?"

"She means a waltz," Mr. Chester repeated impressively, "the most beautiful and dignified dance ever invented. Shall we show him, Miss Enid?"

And, to Quin's unbounded amazement, Mr. Chester and Miss Enid proceeded to demonstrate, there on the narrow landing, the grace and beauty of the "glide waltz"; and so absorbed were they in the undertaking that they did not even know when he ceased to be a spectator and Miss Isobel became one.

The latter, inexpressibly shocked at the way things were going in the ball-room, was on her way upstairs, when she was confronted with the amazing spectacle of her sister and the bald-headed Mr. Chester revolving solemnly and rhythmically in each other's arms on the shadowy landing.

The only doubt that Miss Isobel had ever harbored concerning an all-wise Providence arose from the passage in Scripture that read: "Man and woman created He them." In her secret heart she had always felt that some other, less material scheme might have been evolved. Softly retracing her steps, she slipped back downstairs and took her place beside her increasingly indignant mother.

The new wine was proving entirely too much for the old bottles. Madam's ultimatums and Miss Isobel's protests had alike proved unavailing. The young people invaded the house like a swarm of noisy locusts. Between dances they flew out to the porch, some of the couples dashing out to sit in automobiles, others driving madly around the block to the incessant honking of horns. Then the music would call them back, and in they would pour, singing and whistling as they came, shouting jests from room to room, playing ball with the decorations, utterly regardless of everything save their own restless, reckless, daring selves. Maddest of them all was Eleanor, who, conscious of the stern disapproval of the family and rebelling against their attempted restraint, led the merry revolt against old-time proprieties and took her fling, for once regardless of consequences.

Quin, meanwhile, had gone back to the dressing-room and was making frantic efforts to reduce the swelling in his face. If he could only keep it down until after his dance with Eleanor, it might swell to the dimensions of the dome of St. Peter's! A hurried survey from over the banisters assured him that supper was soon to be served, and he went back to his hot applications with renewed courage.

But ill luck pursued him. No sooner had the guests been seated at small round tables and the refreshments served, than some one remembered that

a big charity ball was in progress at the armory, and it was proposed that the evening be concluded there. The suggestion met with instant approval. In spite of the indignant protests of the elders, the gay company, headed by Eleanor, left the half-eaten ices melting on their plates, and, rising in a body, took noisy and immediate flight.

At twelve o'clock the elaborately decorated rooms were empty, the musicians were packing their instruments, the caterers were removing trays of untasted food, and Quin, standing dazed in the deserted hall, one hand clasping his shirt-front and the other on his face, was trying in vain to realize that the party which he had inspired had proved his Waterloo!

CHAPTER 15

THE next day Quin sold his dinner-coat for a fourth of what he paid for it, and forswore society forever. There was absolutely nothing in it, he assured the Martels, a conviction that assorted strangely with the fact that he devoured the columns in the daily papers devoted to the doings of the social elect, and waded through endless lists under the caption "Among Those Present." Every hour in the day he invented a new scheme for seeing Eleanor, which pride alone prevented him from carrying out. He wrote her a dozen notes, all of which he tore up; he went out of his way to pass through the streets where he might catch a glimpse of her, and seized the slightest excuse for errands to the Bartlett house. But the days of her holiday slipped away, and he neither saw nor heard from her.

Each morning at breakfast Mr. Martel would say hopefully, "Well, Eleanor will surely grace our humble abode to-day," or, "Something tells me my lady-bird will come to-day!" And each evening Quin would rush home from work buoyed up by the hope that he might find her.

"I bet she'd come to-day if she knew Captain

Phipps was going to be here," said Myrna one morning, wagging her head wisely.

"What 's that got to do with it?" Rose asked sharply.

"They 're sweethearts," said Myrna, with the frightful astuteness of twelve. "And old Madam Bartlett won't let him come to the house, and Nell has to see him on the sly."

"Tut, tut, child! Where did you get that notion?" asked Mr. Martel, peeling an orange with his little fingers gracefully extended. "Harold Phipps is years older than Nellie. He is interested solely in her professional career. He has a lovely, detached soul, as impersonal— What is the matter, Rosalind?"

"Nothing—crumb went down wrong. What are *you* laughing at, Quinby Graham?"

"Another crumb," said Quin.

Between him and Rose there had sprung up a curious intimacy. All sorts of little wireless messages flashed between them, and Rose always seemed to know things without being told. She had discovered long ago that he was in love with Eleanor, and, instead of scoffing at him or teasing him, she did him the supreme favor of listening to him. Many a night, after the rest of the family had gone to bed, they lingered on before the fire in the shabby sitting-room, Rose invariably curled up in the sofa corner and Quin stretched out on the floor with his head against her knees.

After his somewhat rigorous discipline at the Bartletts' it was like slipping out of the harness to be back at the Martels'. They held him up to no standard, and offered no counsel of perfection. He could tell his best stories without fear of reproof, laugh as loud as he liked, and whistle and sing without disturbing anybody. Rose mended his clothes, doctored him when he was sick, petted him in public as well as in private, and even made free to pawn his uniform when the collector threatened to turn off the gas if the bill was not paid.

One evening, coming in unexpectedly, he had surprised her kissing Harold Phipps in the front hall. Harold's back had been to the door, and at a signal from Rose Quin had beat a hasty retreat. She explained later that she was letting the magnificent Harold have just enough rope to hang himself; and Quin, glad of anything that deflected Phipps from the pursuit of Eleanor, laughed with her over the secret flirtation and failed to see the danger lights that hung in her eyes.

Financial affairs were evidently going worse than usual with the Martels these days. Cass, adamant in his resolve to pay off the numerous debts contracted by the family during his absence abroad, refused to contribute more than the barest living expenses. Rose had given up the dancing classes and taken a position in one of the big department-stores. Edwin B. had had to leave high school and

go to work. The adopted baby had been regretfully sent to the Orphans' Home. The little brown house was reefing all its sails in a vain effort to weather the coming storm.

The one member of the family who soared on wings of hope above the sordid facts of the situation was Claude Martel. After years of search, he had at last found the generous benefactor, the noble young patron, who recognized the merit of his work. They spent hours together elaborating the plot of "Phantom Love" and discussing every detail of its construction. Occasionally on Saturday night Mr. Martel would mention quite confidentially to Quin that, owing to some delayed payments, he was a little pressed for ready money and that a small loan would be appreciated. This request invariably resulted in an elaborate Sunday dinner, capped with a couple of bottles of Haut Sauterne in which Mr. Martel took the precaution of drinking everybody's health twice over.

Ten days after the Easter party, when Quin had almost despaired of seeing Eleanor at all, he found her car parked in front of the house when he returned in the evening. Mounting the front steps two at a time, he opened the door with his latch-key, then paused with his hand still on the knob. Queer sounds were coming from the sitting-room—sounds of a man's agitated voice, broken by sobs. Unde-

terred by any sense of delicacy, Quin pushed open the door and bolted in.

Mr. Martel was sitting in the arm-chair in an attitude *King Lear* might have envied. Every line of his face and figure suggested unmitigated tragedy. Even the tender ministrations of Eleanor Bartlett who knelt beside him, failed to console him or to stem the tide of his lamentations.

"What 's the matter?" cried Quin in alarm. "What has happened?"

Papa Claude, resting one expressive hand on Eleanor's head, extended the other to Quin.

"Come in, my boy, come in," he said brokenly. "You are one of us; nothing shall be kept from you in this hour of great affliction. I am ruined, Quinby—utterly, irrevocably ruined!"

"But how? What 's happened?"

"It 's grandmother!" exclaimed Eleanor, struggling to her feet and speaking with dramatic indignation. "She 's written him a letter I 'll never forgive—never! I don't care if the money *is* due me. I don't want it. I won't have it! What is six thousand dollars to me if it turns Papa Claude out in the street?"

"But here—hold on a minute!" said Quin. "What 's all the racket about?"

"It 's about money," Mr. Martel roused himself to explain—"the grossest and most material thing in the world. Years ago Eleanor's father and I entered

into a purely personal arrangement by which he advanced me a few thousand dollars in a time of temporary financial depression, and as a mere matter of form I put up this house as security. Had the dear lad lived, nothing more would ever have been said about it. He was the soul of generosity, a prince among men. But, unfortunately, at his death he left his mother Eleanor's trustee."

"And she has simply *hounded* Papa Claude," Eleanor broke in. "She has tried to make him pay interest on that old note every single year, when she knew I did n't need the money in the least. And now she had notified him she will not renew the note on any terms."

"She can't collect what you have n't got, can she?" Quin asked.

"She can sell the roof over our heads," said Papa Claude, with streaming eyes lifted to the object referred to. "She can scatter my beloved family and drive me back into the treadmill of teaching. And all through this blessed, innocent child, who would give all she has in the world to see her poor old grandfather happy!"

Again Eleanor, moved to a passion of sympathy, flung her arms around him, declaring that if they made him pay the note she would refund every penny of it the day she was twenty-one.

But Papa Claude was not to be consoled.

"It will be too late," he said hopelessly. "All I

required was one year more in which to retrieve my fortunes and achieve my life ambition. And now, with success almost within my grasp, the goal within sight, this cruel blow, this bolt from the blue——"

"Have n't you got any other property or stocks or insurance that you could turn over?" asked Quin, who felt that the occasion demanded numerical figures rather than figures of speech.

"Only a small farm out near Anchordale, which belonged to my precious wife's father. It is quite as worthless as he was, poor dear! I have offered it repeatedly in payment, but they refused to consider it."

"Is there a house on it?" persisted Quin.

"Yes—an uninhabitable old stone structure that has stood there for nearly a century. For years I have tried in vain to rent or sell it. I have left no stone unturned, Quinby. I know I am regarded as a visionary, a dreamer, but I assure you——"

"What about the ground?"

"Very hilly and woody. Absolutely good for nothing but a stock farm. Utterly incapable of cultivation. It 's no use considering it, my dear boy. I have viewed the matter from every conceivable angle. There is no reprisal. I am doomed. This beloved house will be sold, my family scattered. I an old man, a penniless outcast——"

"No, no, Papa Claude!" protested Eleanor. "You *sha'n't* be turned out. We must borrow the money.

It 's only a little over a year until I 'm of age, and then I can pay it all back. Surely we can find somebody to help us out!"

"Ah, my darling, your trust is born of inexperience. People do not lend money without security. There is absolutely no one to whom I can appeal."

Eleanor, sitting on the arm of his chair, suddenly started up.

"I have it!" she cried. "I know who will help us! Captain Phipps! He knows better than any one else what it means to you to have this next year free to finish the play. He will be *glad* to do it; I know he will."

Mr. Martel looked slightly embarrassed. "As a matter of fact, he has been approached on the subject," he said. "He was most sympathetic and kind, but unfortunately his money is all invested at present."

"Fiddlesticks!" cried Eleanor in a tone so suggestive of her paternal grandmother that Quin smiled. "What difference does it make if it *is* invested? Let him un-invest it. I am sure I could get him to lend it to *me,* only I would hate awfully to ask him."

Mr. Martel's roving eyes came back to hers hopefully.

"I wonder if you could?" he said, grasping at the proffered straw. "Perhaps if he understood that *your* career was at stake, that my disappointment

would mean *your* disappointment, he would make some special effort to assist us. Will you go to him, child? Will you plead our cause for us?"

Eleanor hesitated but a moment; then she set her lips firmly. "Yes," she said, with a little catch in her voice; "I will. I 'll go to him in the morning."

Quin, who had been staring out of the window, deep in thought, turned abruptly to Mr. Martel.

"When do you have to have the money?" he asked.

"By next Wednesday, the first—no, the second of April. The date is burned in my memory."

"You see, there 's no time to lose," said Eleanor. "I 'd rather die than do it, but I 'll ask Harold Phipps to-morrow morning."

"No, you won't," said Quin peremptorily; "I am going to get the money myself."

"But he would n't lend it to *you*. You don't understand!"

"Yes, I do. Will you leave the matter with me until Sunday night, Mr. Martel, and let me see what I can do?"

Quin made the suggestion as calmly as if he had unlimited resources at his disposal. Had the sum been six million dollars instead of six thousand, he would have made the offer just the same. The paramount necessity of the moment was to keep Eleanor Bartlett from borrowing money from a man like Harold Phipps. Mr. Martel's claims were of secondary consideration.

"We might let him try, grandfather," suggested Eleanor. "If he does n't succeed, there would still be time for me to speak to the Captain."

"But, my boy, where would *you* turn? What influence could you bring to bear?"

"Well, you 'd have to trust me about that," Quin said. "There are more ways than one of raising money, and if you 'll leave it to me——"

"I will! I will!" cried Mr. Martel in a burst of confidence. "I shift my burden to your strong young shoulders. For three days I have borne the agony alone. There were special reasons for Cassius not being told. He is one of the noblest of God's creatures, but he lacks sentiment. I confess I have too much. These old walls are but brick and mortar to him, but to me they are the custodians of the past. Here I had hoped to sit in the twilight of my life and softly turn the leaves of happy memories. But there! Enough! 'The darkest hour oft precedes the dawn!' I will not despair. In your hands and my darling Eleanor's I leave my fate. Something tells me that, between you, you will save me! In the mean season not a word, not a syllable to any one. And now let us have some music and banish these unhappy topics."

It was amazing how a gentleman so crushed by fate at five could be in such splendid form by seven. Mr. Martel had insisted upon having a salad and ices for dinner in honor of Eleanor's presence, and

he mixed the French dressing with elaborate care, and enlivened the company with a succession of his sprightliest anecdotes.

It was Quinby Graham who was the grave one. He ate his dinner in preoccupied silence, arousing himself to sporadic bursts of merriment only when he caught Eleanor's troubled eyes watching him. Just how he was going to proceed with his colossal undertaking he had not the faintest idea. One wild scheme after another presented itself, only to be discarded as utterly impractical.

Under cover of leaving the dining-room, Eleanor managed to whisper to him:

"Make Cass let you take me home. I've simply got to talk to you."

But neither Cass nor Quin was to have the privilege. Mr. Martel announced that he was going to escort her himself. The only crumb of comfort that Quin was able to snatch from the wretched evening was when he was helping her on with her coat in the hall.

"When can I see you?" he whispered anxiously.

"I don't know," she whispered back; "every hour 's taken."

"What about Sunday afternoon?"

"I've promised to motor out to Anchordale with Aunt Flo and Uncle Ranny to hunt for wild flowers. Think of it! When all this trouble 's brewing."

"Anchordale," repeated Quin absently, holding her

coat suspended by the collar and one sleeve. "Anchordale! By golly! I 've got an idea! Say, I 'm going along Sunday. You manage it somehow."

"But I can't manage it! You are n't invited; and, besides——"

"I can't help that—I 'm going. What time do you start?"

"Three o'clock. But you can't go, I tell you! They won't understand."

"All ready, Nellie?" called a voice on the stairway; and Papa Claude, with a smile of perfect serenity on his face, bore lightly and consciously down upon them.

CHAPTER 16

DURING the rushing Easter vacation, Eleanor had seen less of Harold Phipps than Quin had feared. Considering the subliminal state of understanding at which they had arrived in their voluminous letters, it was a little awkward to account for the fact that she had found so little time to devote exclusively to him. They had met at dances and had had interrupted tête-à-têtes in secluded corners, and several stolen interviews in the park; but her duties as hostess to two lively guests had left little time for the exacting demands of platonic friendship. Now that the girls were gone, she had counted on this last Sunday at Uncle Ranny's as a time when she could see Harold under proper conditions and make amends for any seeming neglect.

But when Sunday came, and she found herself seated at Aunt Flo's small, perfectly appointed dinner-table, she found it increasingly difficult to keep her mind upon the brilliant and cynical conversation of her most admired friend. To be sure, they exchanged glances freighted with meaning, and as usual her vanity was touched by the subtle homage of one who apparently regarded the rest of humanity

with such cold indifference. He was the first person, except Papa Claude, who had ever taken her and her ambitions seriously, and she was profoundly grateful. But, notwithstanding the fact that she felt honored and distinguished by his friendship, she sometimes, as now, found it difficult to follow the trend of his conversation.

An hour before she had received an agonized note from her grandfather saying that nothing had been accomplished, and that, unless she could use her influence "in a quarter that should be nameless, all, all would be lost!"

Her dark, brooding eyes swept the table with its profusion of silver and cut glass, its affectation of candle-light when the world without was a blaze of sunshine. She looked at Uncle Ranny, with his nervous, twitching lips and restless, dissatisfied eyes; at Aunt Flo, delicate, affected, futile; at Harold Phipps, easy, polished, serene. What possible chance would there be of rousing people like that to sympathy for poor, visionary Papa Claude? For three days the dread of having to fulfil her promise had hung over her like a pall. Now that the time was approaching, the mere thought of it made her head hot and her hands cold.

"Cheer up, Nell!" her uncle rallied her. "Don't let your misdeeds crush you. You 'll be in high favor again by the time you get back from Baltimore."

"Are you sharing my unpopularity with the family?" asked Harold.

Eleanor confessed that she was. "I 've been in disgrace ever since my party," she said. "Did Uncle Ranny tell you the way we shocked the aunties?"

"I did," said Mr. Ranny; "also the way sister Isobel looked when little Kittie Mason shook the shimmy. It 's a blessing mother did not see her; I veritably believe she would have spanked her."

"A delicious household," pronounced Harold. "What a pity they have banished me. I should so love to put them in a play!"

"But I would n't let you!" Eleanor cried, so indignantly that the other three laughed.

"Neither bond nor free," Harold said, pursing his lips and lifting his brows. "A little pagan at home and a puritan abroad. How are we going to emancipate her, Ran?"

"You need n't worry," said Mrs. Ranny, lazily lighting her cigarette. "Eleanor is a lot more subtle than any one thinks; she 'll emancipate herself before long."

Eleanor was grateful to Aunt Flo. She was tired of being considered an ingénue. She wanted to be treated with the dignity her twenty years demanded.

"I have a plan for her," said Harold, with a proprietary air. "Who knows but this time next year she will be playing in 'Phantom Love'?"

Eleanor's wandering thoughts came to instant attention.

"Is there a part I could play?" she asked eagerly, leaning across the table with her chin on her clasped hands.

Harold watched her with an amused smile. "What would you say if I told you I had written a rôle especially for you? Would you dare to take it?"

Eleanor closed her eyes and drew a breath of rapture.

"*Would* I? There is n't anything in heaven or earth that could prevent me!"

"Mrs. Bartlett," said the trim maid, "there 's a young man at the front door."

The conversation hung suspended while Mrs. Ranny inquired concerning his mission.

"It 's the young man that brings messages from the office, ma'am."

"Oh, it must be Quin," said Mr. Ranny, rising and going into the hall. "Did you want to see me about something?"

Eleanor held her breath to listen. Was it possible that that absurd boy had actually followed her up to the Bartletts' with the intention of going with them on their expedition? Had n't it been enough for him to come to her party in that idiotic coat, with his shirt-front bulging and his face swollen? Of course she liked him—she liked him immensely; but he had no right to impose upon her kindness, to make

a pretext of his interest in Papa Claude to force himself in where he was not invited. Now that he had got into the scrape, he would have to get out of it as best he could. She was resolved not to lift a finger to help him.

"Oh! I did n't understand"—Mr. Ranny's voice could be heard from the hall, with a cordial emphasis evidently intended to cover a blunder. "Come right in the dining-room; we are just having coffee. You know these ladies, of course, and this is Captain Phipps, Mr. Graham."

Quin came into the room awkwardly, half extended his hand, then withdrew it hastily as Harold, without rising from the table, gave him a curt nod and said condescendingly:

"How do you do, Graham?"

Eleanor's quick understanding glance swept from the erect, embarrassed, boyish figure in the badly fitting cheap suit and obviously new tan shoes, to the perfectly groomed officer lounging with nonchalant grace with his crossed arms on the table. A curious idea occurred to her: Suppose they should change places, and Harold should stand there in those dreadful clothes Quin wore, and receive a snub from an ex-officer—would he be able to take it with such simple dignity and give no sign of his chagrin except by the slow color that mounted to his neck and brow? She, who a moment before had been ready to anni-

hilate the intruder, rose impulsively and held out a friendly hand.

"Mr. Graham and I are old friends," she said lightly. "We knew each other out at the hospital even before he came to stay at grandmother's."

The next instant she was sorry she had spoken: for the self-control for which she had commended him suddenly departed, and his eyelids, which should have been discreetly lowered, were lifted instead, and such an ardent look of gratitude poured forth that she was filled with confusion.

For half an hour four uncomfortable people sat in the little gilded cage of a drawing-room, and everybody wondered why somebody did n't do something to relieve the situation. Mr. and Mrs. Ranny made heroic efforts to entertain their unwelcome guest; Harold Phipps moved about the room with ill-concealed impatience; and Eleanor sat erect, with tightly clasped hands, as angry with Harold as she was with Quin.

"Mr. Graham," said Mrs. Ranny at length, when Harold had looked at his watch for the fourth time, "I am afraid we shall have to ask you to excuse us. You see, this is our wedding anniversary, and we always celebrate it by a sentimental pilgrimage in search of wild flowers. I am afraid it 's about time we were starting."

Eleanor felt Quin's eyes seek hers confidently,

but she refused to meet them. There was a painful silence; then he spoke up hopefully:

"I know where there are wild flowers to burn: I was at a place yesterday where you could hardly walk for them; I counted seven different kinds in a space about as big as this room."

"Where?" demanded Mr. and Mrs. Ranny in one breath.

"Out Anchordale way—I don't know the name of the road. It 's an out-of-the-way sort of place. Never was there myself until yesterday."

"Could you find it again?" Mrs. Ranny asked with an enthusiasm hitherto reserved for her poodle.

"Sure," said Quin, shoving his hands in his pockets and leaning back with the frankest and best-natured of smiles. "I never saw so many cowslips and buttercups and yellow violets, and these here little arums."

"Arums!" repeated Eleanor. "What do you know about wild flowers?"

"I lived with 'em up in the Maine woods," said Quin. "I don't know their high-brow names, but I know the kind of places they grow in and where to look for 'em."

"Let's take him along!" said Mrs. Ranny. "We won't mind being a bit crowded in the motor, will we?"

Involuntarily all eyes turned toward Harold Phipps.

"Not in the least," he said, flicking an ash from the sleeve of his uniform with a dexterous little finger, "especially as I am not going to be with you all the way. These bucolic joys are hardly in my line. I 'll get you to drop me at the Country Club."

It was Eleanor's turn to cast a look of tragic appeal and get no response. In vain she tried to persuade him to reconsider his decision. His only concession was that he would remain at the apartment with her if she would give up the expedition, a suggestion that was promptly vetoed by Aunt Flo. Eleanor was angry enough to cry as she flung on her wraps in the little silk-hung guest-room. Men were so selfish, she savagely told herself; if either Quin or Harold had had a particle of consideration for her they would not have spoiled her last day at home.

On the way out to the club she sat between them, miserably indifferent to the glory of the spring day and refusing to contribute more than an occasional monosyllable to the conversation, which needed all the encouragement it could get to keep going.

"Shall I see you again before you go?" Harold asked coldly, upon leaving the car.

She wanted very much to say no, and to say it in a way that would punish him; but, in view of the important matter pending, she was forced to swallow her pride and compromise.

"I can see you to-night at the Newsons', unless

you prefer spending your evening here at the club."

"You know perfectly well what I prefer," he said with a meaning look; and then, without glancing at Quin, across whose knees he had clasped Eleanor's hand, he bade his host and hostess an apologetic good-by and mounted the club-house steps.

"What *made* you come?" Eleanor demanded fiercely of Quin, under cover of the starting motor.

"I had to," Quin whispered back apologetically. "We got to sell 'em the farm."

"What farm? Papa Claude's? Whom are you going to sell it to?"

Quin lifted a warning finger and nodded significantly at the back of Mr. Ranny's unsuspecting head.

"Uncle Ranny?" Eleanor's lips formed the words incredulously. Then the mere suggestion of outwitting her grandmother and saving Papa Claude by such a master stroke of diplomacy struck her so humorously that she broke into laughter, in which Quin joined.

"You two are very lively all of a sudden," Mrs. Ranny said over her shoulder. "What is the joke?"

"Miss Eleanor and I have gone into the real estate business. Do you want to buy a farm?"

"We always want to buy a farm. We look at every one we hear is for sale. But they all cost too much."

"This one won't. It 's a bargain-counter farm.

A house and fifteen acres. You can get it for six thousand dollars if you'll buy it to-day."

"All right; we 'll take it," cried Mr. Ranny gaily. "Lead us to it."

The quest for the farm became so absorbing that the wild flowers were forgotten. The oftener they took the wrong road and had to start over, the keener they became to reach their destination.

"I believe it was a pipe-dream," said Mr. Ranny; "you never saw the place at all."

"Yes, I did! I 'm not kidding you. It 's a regular peach of a place for anybody that 's got money to fix it up. Hold on a minute; this looks like the side lane. Do you mind walking the rest of the way?"

"Not if we get anywhere," said Mr. Ranny.

Their way led through a tangled thicket, across a log bridge, and up a steep hillside abloom from base to summit with early spring flowers. Down through the tender green leaves the sunshine poured, searching out many nooks and corners at which it would get no chance when the heavier foliage intervened.

"This is where the land begins," said Quin. "Did you ever see such bully old trees? Any time you wanted to sell off lots, you see, you could do it on this side, without touching the farm."

"Where 's the house?" asked Mrs. Ranny.

"Right through here," said Quin, holding back the branches. "Now, ain't that a nice old place?"

His enthusiasm met with no response.

In the center of what had once been a clearing stood an old stone building, half smothered in a wilderness of weeds and sassafras and cane, its one big chimney dreaming in the silence that seemed to have encompassed it for ages. The shutters hung disconsolate on their hinges, the window-panes were broken, the cornice sagged dejectedly.

Eleanor's heart sank. It was worse, far worse, than Papa Claude had described it, fit only for the birds and spiders and chipmunks that were already in possession. How Quin could ever for a moment have thought of selling such a place to the fastidious Bartletts was more than she could imagine.

But he was carrying the matter off with a high hand, in spite of the dismayed faces of his prospective buyers.

"Of course it needs a shave," he admitted, as he tore down a handful of trailing vines that barred the front door. "But you just wait till you get inside and see the big stone fireplace and the queer cupboards. Why, this house is historic! It 's been here since pioneer days. Look out for the floor; it 's a bit rotten along here."

"I don't think I 'll come in," said Mrs. Ranny, holding up her skirts.

"What a funny little staircase!" cried Eleanor. "And what huge rooms! You *must* come in, Aunt Flo, and see the fireplace."

"And look at the walls!" cried Quin. "You don't see walls like those these days. But you just wait till you get upstairs. You 've got the surprise of your life coming to you."

"Outside 's good enough for me," Mr. Ranny declared. "I want to take a look at that old apple orchard."

"I 'll go upstairs with you!" said Eleanor. "Come on, Aunt Flo; let 's see what it 's like."

At the top of the steps they both gave an exclamation of delight. The house, hemmed in, in front, by its trees and underbrush, overlooked from its rear windows a valley of surpassing loveliness. For miles the eye could wander over orchards full of pink-and-white peach blossoms on leafless boughs, over farm-lands and woody spaces full of floating clouds of white dogwood. Through the paneless windows came the warm spring air, full of the odor of tender growing things and the wholesome smell of the freshly upturned earth.

"Randolph Bartlett, come up here this instant!" called Mrs. Ranny. "It's the loveliest thing you ever saw!"

But Mr. Ranny was eagerly examining the remains of a somewhat extensive chicken farm.

"Go down and show him around," Eleanor advised Quin, with a glimmer of hope. "Aunt Flo and I will explore the rest of the house."

They not only explored, but in their imagination

they remodeled it. Eleanor, in spite of her day-dreams, was a very practical little person, and, with her power of visualizing a scene for others as well as for herself, she soon made Mrs. Ranny see the place painted and clean, with rag rugs on the floors, quaint old mahogany furniture, tall brass candlesticks on the mantel, and gay chintz curtains at the windows.

Mrs. Ranny grew quite animated talking about it, and forgot the disturbing fact that she had not had a cigarette since dinner.

"Do you know," she said to Eleanor, as they came back to the window and looked down at the two men talking and gesticulating eagerly in the garden below, "I believe if Ranny had something like this to work with and play with, things would be different."

"Of course they would," Eleanor agreed eagerly —"for him and for you too. Why don't you try it, Aunt Flo?"

"Oh, it would cost too much to put it in repair. But then, six thousand dollars is very little, is n't it? Ran spent that much for his big car."

"Yes; and he could *sell* his big car. You 'd lots rather have this than an extra motor. And we could get him interested in fixing the place up, and he could keep dogs and cows and things——"

"But what about his mother?"

"You would n't have to tell her. She will be going to Maine in June, and you and Uncle Ranny could be all settled by the time she comes home!"

Eleanor had forgotten all about Papa Claude in her eagerness to get Uncle Ranny his heart's desire.

"I believe we could do it!" Mrs. Ranny was saying. "The chief expense would be putting in a couple of bath-rooms and fixing up the floors. As for the furniture, I have all my mother's stuff packed away in the warehouse—nice, quaint old things that would suit this place perfectly."

"Oh, Aunt Flo, let 's go down this minute and make Uncle Ranny buy it!"

Randolph Bartlett, whose powers of resistance were never strong, was already lending a willing ear to Quin's persuasive arguments, when Eleanor and Mrs. Ranny descended upon him in a whirlwind of enthusiasm. They both talked at once, rushing him from one spot to another, vying with each other in pointing out the wonderful possibilities of the place.

"See here, is this a frame-up?" he asked laughingly. "You are not actually in earnest, Flo? You don't mean that you would consider the place seriously?"

"But I do. I never wanted anything so much in my life!"

Mr. Ranny looked at her in amazement. "And

you mean you 'd be willing to come out here and live four months in the year?"

"I mean, if we could get it fixed up right, I 'd live here the year round. We are only fifteen minutes from town, and all our friends live out this way."

"By George, I 've almost a notion to try it!" Mr. Ranny's eyes were shining. "Do you believe I could pull it off, Quin? I 've made such a darned fizzle of things in the past that I 'm almost afraid to kick over the traces again."

"The trouble is, you 've never given a big enough kick to get loose," said Quin. "Here 's your chance to show 'em what you can do. I believe if you 'd buy this place, and buckle down to knocking it into shape, you could have as pretty a little stock farm as there is in the State."

"That sounds mighty good to me!" said Mr. Ranny with the look of a prisoner who is promised a parole. "When do you have to give an answer?"

"My option is up at midnight."

"Good heaven! You don't mean to-night?"

"Yes, sir; not a minute later."

"I am afraid that settles it, as far as I 'm concerned."

"No, it does n't!" insisted Mrs. Ranny. "If you really want it, there is no reason you should n't have it. The ground alone is worth the price asked. Let the others go back to the car while you and I talk the matter over. It 's the chance we 've been

looking for for ten years, and I 'm not going to let it slip."

The next hour was one Eleanor never forgot. She and Quin, confident of the success of their conspiracy, were also jubilant over what they regarded as Mr. Ranny's possible emancipation. They already saw him a reformed character, a prosperous and contented farmer, no longer a menace to the peace of the family. So elated were they that, instead of going to the road, they explored the woods, and ended by racing down the hill like a couple of irresponsible children.

When they at last got back to the car, Eleanor, disheveled and limp, sank on the running-board and laughingly made room for Quin beside her. She had quite forgotten to be grown up and temperamental, a fact that Quin was prompt to take advantage of.

"See here!" he said. "Am I going to get a commission for all this?"

"How much do you want?"

"I want a lot!" he threatened.

He was leaning forward with his elbows on his knees, tracing figures in the sand with his shoe. Eleanor noticed the nice way his hair grew on the back of his neck and the white skin that met the clear brown skin at the collar-line. In spite of his bigness and his strength, he seemed very young and defenseless when it came to his dealings with girls.

It was useless to deny that she knew what he wanted. His eyes had been saying it persistently each time they had met hers for three months. They had whispered it after that first dance at the Hawaiian Garden; they had murmured it through the hospital days; they had shouted it this afternoon at Uncle Ranny's, so loud that she thought every one must surely hear. But when a young lady is engaged in the exciting business of playing with fire she does n't always heed even a shouted warning. As long as she was very careful, she told herself, and snuffed out every blaze that threatened to become unmanageable, no damage would be done. The present moment was one requiring snuffers.

"We can't begin to pay you what we owe you," she said in her most conventional tone. "If things go as we hope they will, it will mean everything to Uncle Ranny as well as to Papa Claude."

"I did n't do it for them only," Quin blurted out. "I did n't want you to borrow money from Captain Phipps."

The temptation to encourage this special spark was not to be resisted.

"You don't love Mr. Phipps very much, do you?" she said.

"No; do you?"

"Well, I *like* him. He is one of my very best friends."

"Am I?" demanded Quin with terrible directness.

It was Eleanor's turn to trace patterns in the sand.

"Well, you see——" she began.

"No, I don't." Quin rose indignantly. "There 's nobody in the world that would do any more for you than I would. I may be chasing the kite in thinking that you *want* me to do anything, but if you 'll just let me under the ribbon, you bet your life I 'll give Phipps and the rest of the talent a run for their money!"

He stood staring hard down the road for a moment, while she sat in embarrassed silence; then he broke forth again:

"I know you don't want me to say these things. I know every time you head me off. But if you 'll just let me get it off my chest this once, then I promise to keep the cork in if it busts the bottle!"

Eleanor laughed in spite of herself.

"All right," she said; "I 'll listen."

"Well," said Quin, "it 's this way. I know you don't care a tinker's damn for me in the way I care for you. But you can't deny that you do like me some. You would n't talk to me like you do and let me do things for you if you did n't. What I want you to promise is that whenever you need a friend—a *best* friend, mind you—you will come straight to me."

He looked worth coming to as he stood there, big and strong and earnest; and Eleanor, being young and a woman, promptly forgot her good resolutions

not to encourage him, and rose impulsively and held out her hand.

"I do promise, Quin," she said, "and I thank you with all my heart."

Then a curious and unexpected thing happened to her. As she stood there on the lonely country road with her hand in his, a curious, deep, still feeling crept over her, a queer sensation of complete satisfaction that she never remembered to have felt before. For a long moment she stood there, her cheek almost touching that outrageous plaid tie that had so recently excited her derision. Then she snatched her hand away. "Look out!" she warned. "They are coming."

Two minutes later Mr. and Mrs. Ranny, emerging from the thicket with their hands full of wild flowers, found Eleanor seated in the car in a bored attitude, while Quin solicitously examined a rear tire.

"It's all settled!" Mr. Ranny cried exultingly. "The farm is ours!"

CHAPTER 17

ALTHOUGH Quin had taken himself and his career seriously before Eleanor's home-coming, it was nothing in comparison to the fever of energy that possessed him after her departure. He was determined to forge ahead in business, get an education, and become versed in the gentler branches of social life at the earliest possible moment. His chief trouble was that the days contained only twenty-four hours. Even his dreams were a jumble of plows and personal pronouns, of mathematical problems and social proprieties.

At the factory he flung himself into the affairs of the firm with a zeal that at times bordered on officiousness. But Mr. Bangs was beginning to find him useful, and, while he continued to snub him and correct him, he also came to depend upon him, especially in an emergency. Quin, on his part, was for the first time turning a critical eye on his own achievements in relation to those of bigger and abler men, and the result was chastening.

As for his mad thirst for knowledge, even the university classes, difficult as they were proving, failed to satisfy him. He purchased an expensive

"system" in fifteen volumes, by means of which, the prospectus assured him, he could easily achieve a college education in eight months. He wore the covers off the first two booklets, then became disgusted, and devoted himself instead to a small handbook entitled "Words We Mispronounce."

The branch of his education in which he was making least effort and most progress was in the customs and manners of polite society. He did not shine as yet, but he had ceased to offend, and that was a long step forward. Once initiated into the refinements of life, he took to them naturally. Miss Isobel and Miss Enid Bartlett had given him the cue, and Mr. Chester was keeping him up to his standard.

Between him and the latter had sprung up a queer friendship verging on intimacy. Ever since the night of the symphony concert he had served as a connecting link between the long-severed lovers, and out of gratitude he had been adopted as a protégé. It was Mr. Chester who assumed responsibility not only for his musical and literary tastes but for his neckties and hosiery as well. Mr. Chester, in fact, being too negative and conservative, acted as a much-needed soft pedal on Quin's noisy aggressiveness. "Not so loud, Quinby," or, "A little more gently, my boy," he would often say. And Quin would acquiesce good-naturedly and even gratefully. "That 's right, call me down," he would say; "I guess I 'll learn before I die."

In all that he did and said and thought, one object was paramount. He never lost sight of the fact that he was making himself over for Eleanor, and the prize at stake was so colossal that no obstacles deterred him. To be sure, this was not by any means his first amatory venture. As Rose Martel had said, he "had a way with him"—a way that had kept him involved in affairs of the heart since the early days in Nanking when he had succumbed to the charms of a slant-eyed little Celestial at the tender age of seven. He had always had a girl, just as he had always had a job; but both had varied with time and place. With a vocabulary of a dozen words and the sign language, he had managed to flirt across France and back again. He had frivoled with half a dozen trained nurses in as many different hospitals, and had even had a sentimental round with a pretty young stewardess on the transport coming home.

But this affair had been quite different. Instead of wading about in the shallows of love, he had tumbled in head first, and found himself beyond his depth and out of sight of land. It was a case of sink or swim, and Quin was determined not to sink if he could help himself.

The fact that Eleanor Bartlett was not of his world, that she apparently never gave him a second thought, that he had less than nothing on which to build his hopes, only made him take a deeper breath and a longer stroke.

The first gleam of encouragement he had received was that Sunday in the country, when for the fraction of a second she had let him hold her hand. Since then he had written her five letters and received but one brief note in reply. Her silence, however, did not depress him. She had told him she hated to write letters, a sentiment he fully shared. Only in this case he could not help himself. The moment anything of interest happened, he was seized with an uncontrollable impulse to tell Eleanor. He would rush home from the university at night, go up to his room, and, using the corner of his bureau for a desk, cover pages of lined tablet paper with a detailed account of the day's adventures. When every doubtful word has to be looked up in the dictionary, and newly acquired knowledge concerning participles and personal pronouns duly applied, letter-writing is a serious business. Sometimes a page was copied three times before it met with the critical approval of the composer.

Since the passing of the acute financial crisis in the Martel family, Papa Claude had revived amazingly, and was once more wearing a rose in his buttonhole and courting the Muse. He and Harold Phipps spent several afternoons a week working on their play, which they hoped to get fully blocked out before the latter left the service and returned to his home in Chicago.

But, even though the sale of the farm had re-

lieved the financial strain, some other trouble was brewing in the family, the cause of which Quin could not make out. The usually sunny atmosphere was disturbed by frequent electric storms between Cass and Rose, marked by stern disapproval on his part and fiery rebellion on hers. "Rose is going to get herself into trouble!" Cass predicted darkly to Quin; while Rose, on her part, declared that Cass should shave his head and enter a monastery.

"What are you two ragging about, anyhow?" Quin asked one morning at breakfast, when things were worse than usual.

"Rose knows what I 'm talking about," said Cass significantly. "Somebody 's going to get his face pushed in if things keep on like they are going."

Absorption in his own affairs alone prevented Quin from taking an immediate hand in this new family complication. It was not until late in May that he hit upon the truth, quite by accident.

Coming home rather later than usual one night, he stumbled over Cass sitting hunched up on the dark stairway, looking in his striped pajamas like an escaped convict.

"What in the devil are you up to?" Quin demanded, rubbing a bruised shin.

"I am waiting for Rose," said Cass grimly. "Some fellow comes by here every few nights and takes her out in a machine."

"Who is he?"

"I don't know—that 's what I 'm going to find out."

"You crazy wop!" said Quin. "What 's got into you lately? Can't you trust Rose to take care of herself?"

"Yes; but I don't trust any fellow that 'll go with a girl and be ashamed to be seen with her."

"How do you know he 's ashamed to be seen with her?"

"Because he comes sneaking in here after we 've all gone to bed. He don't ring the door-bell; he honks once or twice; and then I hear Rose slipping past my door."

"I did n't know any of Rose's beaux had a machine."

"They have n't. This is some rich guy that thinks any girl that works for her living is an easy mark. I 'll show him a thing or two! I 'll break his damned—— Listen! There 's an automobile stopping now."

He started excitedly down the steps, but Quin grasped his arms.

"Come back here, Cass! You can't go cavorting out there in your pajamas, making a mess of things. You leave it to me. I 'll go out the side way and amble around to the front door the same time they do. They 'll think I 'm just getting home, and I can size him up for you."

The next moment he was out of the house, over

the low hedge, and casually sauntering toward the corner. The night was very dark, lightened only by the swinging street lamp and the two staring eyes of an automobile that had stopped a little distance from the house. Quin saw Rose dart out of the shadows and run toward the house. Some one called her name softly and peremptorily, but she did not stop. A man was following her out of the shadows. But Quin did not wait for him to arrive; he promptly stepped around the corner and met Rose at the front gate.

"What 's up?" he demanded, seeing her quivering lips and angry, excited eyes.

"Tell him to go away!" she whispered, trying to get the gate open. "Tell him I never want him to speak to me again. He *can't* apologize—there is n't anything he can say. Just make him go away, that 's all."

"Miss Martel is making a mountain out of a mole-hill," said a suave voice behind them, and, turning, Quin saw the somewhat perturbed face of Harold Phipps. "If she would listen to me for two minutes——"

"But I won't—not for one minute! You sha'n't speak to me——"

"Just one word alone with you——"

"See here," said Quin, stepping between them and looking Harold Phipps squarely in the eyes. "You heard what she said, did n't you?"

"Yes; but I insist upon her listening to me. She entirely misunderstood something I said."

"I did not!" Rose broke in furiously. "You know perfectly well I did n't. I won't listen to anything you have to say on that or any other subject."

"I sha'n't let you go until you do," he replied in his most authoritative tone.

"Oh, yes, you will," said Quin quietly. "I don't know what the row 's about, but she does n't have to talk to you if she does n't want to."

For a moment the two men stood silently measuring each other; then the one in uniform gave a slight shrug and permitted himself a faint superior smile.

"I see," he said. "The young lady's conduct did not lead me to suppose she was engaged. I congratulate you!" And, turning on his heel, he went back to his car.

Rose turned quickly and seized Quin's arm.

"Don't tell anybody about this, please," she implored. "I 've had my lesson—the beast!"

"What did he do?" demanded Quin, longing for an excuse to annihilate Phipps.

"It was n't so much what he did—it was what he said. But you 've got to promise not to give me away, Quin. You must n't let on that I was out to-night."

"But Cass is on to it. He 's waiting there in the hall now."

She caught her breath sharply.

"Does he know who I was with?"

"Not yet."

"Then he must n't. It would spoil everything for Papa Claude and the play; and, besides, Cass is so excitable. I *have n't* done anything wrong, Quin! I was just out for a little fun, and that contemptible puppy thought——"

"I wish to God I 'd cracked his bean!" said Quin fervently.

"Promise me that you won't tell!"

"I won't tell, but I intend to have it out with him."

"No, no!" she whispered hysterically. "I tell you, nothing more must be said about it. It was partly my fault; only, I did n't know he was that kind of a man. You know yourself I never really liked him. Only it was fun to go out in his car, and I get so sick of not having any clothes or money and having to stay in that deadly old store day in and day out!"

She buried her face in her hands and sobbed violently for a moment; then she caught hold of Quin's sleeve.

"You won't speak to him," she implored, "and you won't tell Cass?"

"I won't do anything you don't want me to," promised Quin, proffering his handkerchief with

his sympathy. "It 's your shooting-match, and Cass has got to keep his hands off."

Cass at this moment cautiously opened the front door, and stood in his bare feet, viewing them with anxious suspicion.

"It 's all right, old cove," said Quin, slipping Rose into the house and pulling the door to after her. "No harm 's done, and she won't do it again."

"How do you know?"

"Because she and the fellow had a blow-out. She says she is through with him for good and all."

"Did you see him?"

"Yes; he 's a average-sized fellow with a smooth face and brown hair."

"Would you know him if you saw him again?"

"Sure. I 'll keep an eye out for him. But you 've got to leave it to me. I can handle the situation all right now, if you just won't butt in."

"If you can get Rose to promise not to see him again, she 'll stick to it; I can say that for her."

"She won't see him. They 've quarreled, I tell you. I heard her balling him out good before he left. The whole thing is settled, and all you got to do is to button up your lip and go to bed."

A week later Papa Claude announced that Harold Phipps was at last released from his onerous duties in the army and had returned to his home in Chicago, where he would in future devote himself to the writing and producing of great American plays.

CHAPTER 18

IN everybody's life there are hours or days or even weeks that refuse to march on with the solemn procession of time, but lag behind and hide in some byway of memory, there to remain for ever and ever. It was such a week that tumbled unexpectedly out of Quin's calendar about the first of June, and lived itself in terms of sunshine and roses, of moonshine and melody, seven halcyon days between the time that Eleanor returned from school and the Bartletts went away for the summer. For the first time since he met her, she seemed to have nothing more demanding to do than to emulate "the innocent moon, who nothing does but shine, and yet moves all the slumbering surges of the world."

There was no doubt about Quin's "slumbering surges" being moved. Within twenty-four hours of her return to town he became totally and hopelessly demoralized. Education and business were, after all, but means to an end, and when he saw what he conceived to be a short cut to heaven, he rashly discarded wings and leaped toward his heart's desire.

The hour before closing at the factory became a time of acute torture. He who usually stayed till

the last minute, engrossed in winding up the affairs of the day, now seemed perfectly willing to trust their completion to any one who would undertake it. The instant the whistle blew he was off like a shot, out of the factory yard, clinging to the platform of a crowded trolley, catching an interurban car, plunging through a thicket, down an old lane, and emerging into Paradise.

The Rannys were having the adventure of their lives with the secret farm, an adventure shared with equal enthusiasm by their co-conspirators. "Valley Mead" was proving the most marvelous of forbidden playthings, and was doing for Randolph Bartlett what doctors and sanitariums and tears and threats had failed to do. The old place had been overhauled, the house made habitable, and now that furnishing was in progress, each day brought new and fascinating developments.

Eleanor had arrived from school just in time to fling herself heart and soul into the enterprise. By a happy chance she had been allowed to spend the week with the Randolph Bartletts, only reporting to her grandmother from time to time for consultations regarding summer clothes. Her strange indifference to this usually all-important question, together with her insistent plea to remain in Kentucky all summer, might have aroused the old lady's suspicion had she not long ago decided that the explanation of all Eleanor's motives was perversity.

Every morning Eleanor and Mrs. Ranny went out to the farm, and worked with enthusiasm. Each piece of furniture that was taken out of the crate was hailed with delight and dragged from one place to another to try its effect. The hanging of curtains was suspended while they rushed out to see the newly arrived rabbits with their meek eyes and tremulous pink mouths, or dashed out to the poultry-yard to have another look at the downy little fluffs of yellow that were pretending to be chickens.

But the real excitement of the day was when the workmen had departed, and Mr. Ranny came out with his machine laden with priceless treasures from the ten-cent store, or later when Quin Graham dashed up the lane with anything from a garden-spade to a bird-house in his hands, and with an enthusiasm and energy in his soul that communicated themselves to all concerned. Then everybody would talk at once, and everybody insist upon showing everybody else what had been done since morning, and there was more hanging of pictures and changing of furniture, and so much chatter and laughter that it was a wonder anything was accomplished.

Mr. and Mrs. Ranny had agreed that they would make Valley Mead livable at the least possible expense, looking forward to a future day to make the improvements that would require much outlay of money. The pride and satisfaction they took in

their petty economies were such as only the inexperienced wealthy can feel.

As for Quin, he moved through the enchanted days, blind, deaf, and dumb to everything but Eleanor. She was the dazzling sun in whose effulgent rays the rest of humanity floated like midges. So wholly blinded was he by her radiant presence that he did not realize the darkness into which he was about to be plunged until her departure was imminent.

The evening before she left found them perched upon the orchard stile, in that stage of intimacy that permitted him to sit at her feet and toy pensively with the tassel on her girdle while his eyes said the unutterable things that his lips were forbidden to utter.

The sky was flooded with luminous color, neither blue nor pink, but something deliciously between, and down below them fields of wheat rippled under the magic light.

"We ought to go in," said Eleanor for the third time. "We 've been out here an outrageously long time."

"They won't miss us," pleaded Quin; "besides, it 's our last night."

"Don't talk about it!" said Eleanor. "It makes me so cross to have to leave it all at the most exciting time! When I get back everything will be finished and the fun all over."

"When *are* you coming back?"

"Not until September. We have to come home then. Something 's going to happen."

Quin stopped twisting the tassel and looked at her quickly.

"What?" he demanded.

"Can you keep a secret?"

"Yes."

"It 's a wedding, Quin."

If the earth had suddenly quaked beneath him he could not have experienced a more horrible sense of devastation. He put out a hand as if to steady himself.

"You don't mean——" he began, and could get no further.

"Yes, I do. It 's to be a home wedding, very quiet, with only the family, and afterward they are going out to the coast."

"Who are?" he asked dully.

"Aunt Enid and Mr. Chester. After waiting for twenty years. Is n't it too funny for words?"

Quin thought it was. He threw himself back and shouted. He had never enjoyed a joke so much in his life. It seemed replete with humor, especially when he shared with Eleanor the part he had played in bringing them together and described the waltz on the landing the night of the Easter party. With the arrogance of youth they laughed hilariously at the late blooming romance.

"What about Queen Vic?" asked Quin. "How did they ever get her consent?"

"They didn't ask for it. After letting her keep them apart all these years, they just announced that they were going to be married in September. I expect she raised the roof; but when she saw it was all settled and she couldn't unsettle it, she came around and told Aunt Enid she could be married at home."

"Good work!" said Quin, who was genuinely fond of both Miss Enid and Mr. Chester. "How is Miss Isobel taking it?"

"Better than you would think. I don't know what has come over Aunt Isobel, she's so much nicer than she used to be. The boys out at the hospital have made her over."

"Miss Isobel's a pippin," said Quin, in a tone that implied a compliment. "You ought to have seen how she looked after me when I was sick. Has Madam found out about her going out to camp?"

"Yes; but she hasn't stopped her. Something you said once about everybody having a right to do his duty as he saw it made Aunt Isobel take a firm stand and stick it out. You have certainly jolted the family out of its ruts, Quin. Look at Uncle Ranny; would you ever take him for the same person he was six months ago?"

Quin removed his enamored gaze from her face long enough to glance toward the house, where the

usually elegant useless Randolph was perched in the crotch of an old ash tree, sawing off a dead limb, and singing as he sawed.

"Well, when it comes to him, I guess I *have* had a finger in the pie," said Quin with pardonable pride. "He has n't slipped the trolley for two months; and if he can stay on the track now, it will be a cinch for him after the first of July. All he needed was a real interest in life, and a chance to work things out for himself."

"It's what we all need," Eleanor said gloomily. "I wish I could do what I liked."

"What would you do?"

"I'd go straight to New York and study for the stage. It is n't a whim—it 's what I 've wanted most to do ever since I was a little girl. I may not have any great talent, but Papa Claude thinks I have. So does Captain Phipps. To have to wait a whole year until I 'm of age is too stupid for words. It 's just some more of grandmother's tyranny, and I 'm not going to submit much longer; would you?"

Quin contemplated his clasped fists earnestly. For the first time, his belief in the consent of the governed admitted of exceptions.

"I 'd go a bit slow," he said, feeling his own way cautiously. "This stage business is a doubtful proposition. I don't see where the fun comes in, pretending to be somebody else all the time."

"You would if you did n't like being yourself. Besides, I don't live my own life as it is."

"You will some day—when you get married."

"But that 's just it! I don't intend to marry—I am going to devote my whole life to my work."

Quin, having but recently recovered from the fear that she was contemplating matrimony, now underwent a similar torture at her avowal that she was not. The second possibility was only a shade less appalling than the first.

"The trouble is," she went on very confidentially, "I am not interested in anything in the world but my art."

"Oh, come now, Miss Eleanor!" Quin rallied her. "You know you were interested in the work out at the camp."

"That 's true. I except that."

"And you can't say you have n't been interested in our selling this farm, and getting Mr. and Mrs. Ranny fixed up, and all that."

"Of course I 've been interested in that; it 's been no end of fun."

"And then," Quin pursued his point quite brazenly, "there 's me. I hope you are a little bit interested in me?"

She tried to take it lightly. "Interested in you? Why, of course I am. We all are. Uncle Ranny was saying only this morning——"

"I don't care a hang what he said. It 's *you* I 'm

talking about. Do you like me any better than you did in the spring?"

"You silly boy, I 've always liked you."

"But I told you I wanted a lot. Have I made any headway?"

"Headway? I should say you have. I never saw such improvement! If the university classes have done this much for you in four months, what will you be by the end of the year?"

"That 's right," said Quin bitterly. "Open the switch and sidetrack me! But just tell me one thing: is there anybody you *are* interested in?"

"Now, see here, Quin," said Eleanor peremptorily, "you have n't any right to ask me questions like that. All I promised was that you could be my chum."

"Yes; but I meant a chum plus."

"Well, you'd better look out or you will be a chum minus." Then she caught sight of his eyes, and leaned forward in sudden contrition. "I 'm sorry to hurt you, Quin, but you must understand——"

"I do," he admitted miserably. "Only this week out here together, and the way you 've looked at me sometimes, made me kind of hope——" His voice broke. "It 's all right. I 'll wait some more."

This was the time Eleanor should have carried out her intention of going back to the house. Instead, she sat on in the deepening twilight under the

feminine delusion that she was being good to the miserable youth who sat huddled close to her knees on the step below her.

Through his whole big being Quin was quivering with the sense of her nearness, afraid to move for fear something stronger than his will would make him seize her slender little body and crush it to him in an agony of tenderness and yearning.

"How beautiful it is out here now!" she said softly. "Don't you love the feel of wings everywhere? Little flying things going home? Everything seems to be whispering!"

Quin did not answer. He sat silent and immovable until the light in the valley had quite faded, and the twitter of the birds had been superseded by the monotonous, mournful plaint of a whip-poor-will in a distant tree. Then he stirred and looked up at Eleanor with a rueful smile.

"I know what 's the matter with that damned old bird," he said. "He's in love!"

CHAPTER 19

NOTWITHSTANDING the fact that the sale of the Martels' house was averted and Rose's affair with Harold Phipps successfully terminated, catastrophe, which was evidently due the family, arrived before the summer had fairly begun. The irrepressible Claude had no sooner weighed the anchor of responsibility than he set sail for New York to embark once more on dramatic waters. He had secured a small part in a summer stock company which would leave him ample time to work on "Phantom Love," which he confidently counted upon to retrieve his fortunes. The withdrawal of even his slender contribution to the household expenses made a difference, especially as Edwin came down with the measles early in July. Before the boy had got the green shade off his afflicted eyes, Cass was laid low with typhoid fever.

No other event in the family could have wrought such disastrous results. Rose was compelled to give up her position to nurse him, and while the income ceased the expenses piled up enormously.

Nothing was more natural than that Quinby Graham should fling himself into the breach. His in-

timacy with Cass had begun on the transport going to France, and continued with unabated zeal until he was wounded in the summer of 1918. For six months he had lost sight of him, only to find him again in the hospital at Camp Zachary Taylor. He was not one to share the privileges of Cass's home without also sharing its hardships.

"It 's a shame we v'e got to take help from you," said Rose; "just when you are beginning to get ahead, too!"

"You cut that out," said Quin. "I 'd like to know if you did n't take me in and treat me like one of the family? Ain't Cass the best friend a man ever had? And would n't he do as much and more for me?"

But even Quin's salary failed to meet the emergency. Doctor's bills, drug bills, grocery bills, became more and more formidable. One day Rose was reduced to selling two of Papa Claude's autographed photographs.

"I would n't do that—yet," said Quin, who had begun to walk to the factory to save carfare. "Those old boys and girls are his friends; we can't sell them. I can see him now talking to 'em through his pipe smoke. I ought to have some junk we can soak. Let 's go see."

The investigation resulted in the conversion of a pair of new wing-toed dancing-shoes and a silver cigarette-case into an ice-bag and an electric fan.

"I could stand everything else," said Rose, "if we could just get the children out of the house. Edwin is still as weak as a kitten, and Myrna looks as if she might come down with the fever any day."

Quin had a brilliant idea. "Why not ship 'em both to the country? Ed could come to town to work every day, and Myrna could help somebody around the house."

"That sounds mighty fine; but who is going to take two children to board for nothing?"

"I don't know yet," said Quin; "that 's what I 've got to find out."

That night he went out to Valley Mead and put the matter squarely up to Mr. and Mrs. Ranny.

"We 're up against it at our house," he said; "I want to borrow something from you two good people."

"You can have anything we 've got!" said Mr. Ranny rashly.

"Well, I want to borrow some fresh air for a couple of sick kids. I want you to ask 'em out here for a week."

Mr. and Mrs. Ranny looked aghast at the preposterous suggestion, but Quin gave them no time to demur. He plunged into explanation, and clinched his argument by saying:

"Ed would only be here at night, and Myrna could help around the house. They are bully

youngsters. No end of fun, and they would n't give you a bit of trouble."

"But I have only one maid!" protested Mrs. Ranny.

"What of that?" said Quin. "Myrna's used to working at home; she 'd be glad to help you."

"If it was anybody on earth but the Martels," Mr. Ranny objected, with contracted brow. "The families have been at daggers' points for years. Why, the very name of Martel makes mother see red."

"Well, the children are n't responsible for that!" Quin broke in impatiently; then he pulled himself up. "However, if you don't want to do 'em a good turn, that settles it."

"But it does n't settle it," said Mr. Ranny. "What are you going to do with them?"

"Hanged if I know," said Quin; "but you bet I 'll do something."

The conversation then wandered off to Eleanor, and Quin listened with vague misgivings to accounts of her good times—yachting parties, tennis tournaments, rock teas, shore dinners—all of which suggested to him an appallingly unfamiliar world.

"I tell you who was up there for a week," said Mr. Ranny. "Harold Phipps. You remember meeting him at our apartment last spring?"

"What's he doing there?" Quin demanded with such vehemence that they both laughed.

"Probably making life miserable for Mother Bartlett," said Mrs. Ranny. "I can't imagine how she ever consented to have him come, or how he ever had the nerve to go, after the way they 've treated him."

"Harold 's not concerned with the feelings of the family," said Mr. Ranny; "he is after Nell."

But Mrs. Ranny scorned the idea. "He looks upon her as a perfect child," she insisted; "besides, he 's too lazy and conceited to be in love with anybody but himself."

"That may be, but Nell's got him going all right."

Then the conversation veered back to the Martels, with the result that an hour later Quin was on his way home bearing a gracefully worded note from Mrs. Ranny inviting the children to spend the following week at Valley Mead. But, in spite of the success of his mission, he sat with a box of fresh eggs in his lap and a huge bunch of flowers in his hand, his hat rammed over his eyes, staring gloomily out of the car window into the starless night.

Since Eleanor's departure he had had no word from her, and the news that filtered through Valley Mead was more disconcerting than the silence. The thought of her dancing, sailing, and motoring with Harold Phipps filled him with a frenzy of jealousy. He grew bitter at the thought of her flitting heedlessly from one luxurious pleasure to another, while Cass lay in that stifling city, fight-

ing for his life and lacking even the necessities for his comfort.

Every week since her departure he had written her, even though the letters grew shorter and blunter as his duties increased. Up until now, however, he, like every one else, had tried to shield Eleanor from anything ugly and sordid. He had tried to make light of the situation and reassure her as to results; but he was determined to do it no longer. It wasn't right, he told himself angrily, for anybody to go through life blinded to all the misery and suffering and poverty in the world. He was going to write her to-night and tell her the whole story and spare her nothing.

But he did not write. When he reached home Cass had had a turn for the worse, and there were ice-baths to prepare and other duties to perform that left him no time for himself.

The next day Edwin and Myrna were sent out to the Randolph Bartletts', and Rose and Quin cleared the decks for the hard fight ahead. Fan Loomis came in to help nurse in the day-time, and Quin was on duty through the long, suffocating August nights.

At the end of the week Cass's condition was so serious that the Bartletts insisted on keeping the children at the farm. Myrna had proved a cheery, helpful little companion, and Edwin, while more

difficult to handle, was picking up flesh and color, and was learning to run the car.

Cass's fever dragged on, going down one day only to rise higher the next. Seven weeks, eight weeks, nine weeks passed, and still no improvement.

Quin, trying to keep up his work at the factory on two or three hours' sleep out of the twenty-four, grew thin and haggard, and coughed more than at any time since he had left the hospital. During the long night vigils he made sporadic efforts to keep up his university work, but he made little headway.

"Go on to bed, Quin," Rose whispered one night, when she found him asleep with his head against the bed-post. "You 'll be giving out next, and God knows what I 'll do then."

"Not me!" he declared, suppressing a yawn. "You 're the one that 's done in. Why don't you stay down?"

"I can't," she murmured, kneeling anxiously beside the unconscious patient. "He looks worse to me to-night. Do you believe we can pull him through?"

She had on a faded pink kimono over her thin night-gown, and her heavy hair was plaited down her back. There were no chestnut puffs over her ears or pink spots on her cheeks, and her lips looked strange without their penciled cupid's bow. But to Quin there was something in her drawn white face and anxious, tender eyes that was more appealing.

In their long siege together he had found a staunch dependence and a power of sacrifice in the girl that touched him deeply.

"I don't know, Rose," he admitted, reaching over and smoothing her hair; "but we 'll do our darnedest."

At the touch of his hand she reached up and impulsively drew it down to her cheek, holding it there with her trembling lips against its hard palm.

The night was intensely hot and still. That afternoon they had moved Cass into Rose's room in the hope of getting more air from the western exposure; but only the hot smell of the asphalt and the stifling odor of car smoke came through the curtainless window. The gas-jet, turned very low, threw distorted shadows on the bureau with its medley of toilet articles and medicine bottles. Through the open door of the closet could be seen Rose's personal belongings; under the table were a pair of high-heeled slippers; and two white stockings made white streaks across the window-sill.

Quin sat by Cass's bedside, with his hand clasped to Rose's cheek, and fought a battle that had been raging within him for days. Without being in the least in love with Rose, he wanted desperately to take her in his arms and comfort her. They were both so tired, so miserable, so desperately afraid of that shadowy presence that hovered over Cass. They were practically alone in the house, account-

able to no one, and drawn together by an overwhelming anxiety. In Rose's state of emotional tension she was responsive to his every look and gesture. He had but to hold out his arms and she would sink into them.

Again and again his eyes traveled from her bright tumbled head to Cass's flushed face, with its absurd round nose and eyes that could no longer keep watch over a pleasure-loving sister. What would happen if Cass should die? Who would take care of her and the children, helpless and penniless, with only Papa Claude and his visions to stand between them and the world? A great wave of sympathy rushed over him for the girl kneeling there with her face buried in the bed-clothes. She had asked so little of life—just a few good times to offset the drudgery, just an outlet for the ocean of love that was dammed up in her small body. Love was the only thing she cared about; it was the only thing that mattered in life. Cass never understood her, but Quin understood her. He was like that himself. The blood was pounding through his veins too, a terrible urgence was impelling him toward her. Why should n't they throw discretion to the winds and answer the call?

Then his mind did a curious thing. It brought up out of the sub-conscious a question that Eleanor Bartlett had once asked him: "Do you think a person has a right to go ahead and do what he

wants, regardless of consequences?" He saw her face, moonlit and earnest, turned up to his, and he heard himself answering her: "That depends on whether he wants the right thing."

Rose stirred, and he withdrew his hand and stood up.

"See here, young lady," he said with authority; "I 'll give you just two minutes to clear out of here! No, I don't want you to leave your door open; I 'll call you if there 's any change."

"But, Quin, I don't want to be alone—I want to be with you." Her eyes were full of frank appeal, and her lips trembling.

"You are too sleepy to know what you want," he said. "Up with you—not another word. You 'll feel better to-morrow. Good-night." And with a little push he put her out of the room and closed the door.

CHAPTER 20

QUIN stood under the big car-shed at the Union Depot, and for the sixth time in ten minutes consulted the watch that was the pride of his life. He had been waiting for half an hour, not because the train was late, but because he proposed to be on the spot if by any happy chance it should arrive ahead of schedule time. The week before he had received a picture post-card on whose narrow margin were scrawled the meager lines:

> So glad Cass is up again. Rose says you 've been a brick. Home on Sept. 2. Hope to see you soon. E. M. B.

It was the only communication he had had from Eleanor since they sat on the stile in the starlight at Valley Mead three months before. To be sure, in her infrequent letters to Rose she had always added, "Give my love to Quinby Graham," and once she said: "Tell him I 've been meaning to write to him all summer." Notwithstanding the fact that Quin had waited in vain for that letter for twelve consecutive weeks, that he had passed through every phase of indignation, jealousy, and consuming fear that can assail a young and undis-

ciplined lover, he nevertheless watched for the incoming train with a rapture undimmed by disturbing reflections. The mere fact that every moment the distance was lessening between him and Eleanor, that within the hour he should see her, hear her, feel the clasp of her hand, was sufficient to send his spirits soaring into sunny spaces of confidence far above the clouds of doubt.

"Hello, Quinby; what are you doing here?" asked a voice behind him; and turning he saw the long, oval face and lady-like figure of Mr. Chester.

"Same thing you are," said Quin, grinning sympathetically. "Only if I was in your shoes I 'd be walking the tracks to meet the train."

Mr. Chester shook his head and smiled primly.

"When you have waited twenty years for a young lady, twenty minutes more or less do not matter."

"They would to me!" Quin declared emphatically. "When is the wedding to be?"

"On the fourteenth. And that reminds me"—Mr. Chester ran his arm confidentially through Quin's and tried to catch step. "I want to ask a favor of you."

A favor to Quin meant anything from twenty-five cents to twenty-five dollars, and the fact that Mr. Chester should come to him flattered and embarrassed him at the same time.

"What 's mine is yours," he said magnanimously.

"No, you don't understand," said Mr. Chester. "You see, not being a club man or a society man, I have in a way dropped out of things. I have comparatively few friends, and unfortunately they are not in a set personally known to Madam Bartlett. Miss Enid and I thought that it might solve the difficulty, and avoid complications, if you would agree to serve as my best man."

"Why, I 'd be willing to serve as the preacher to see you and Miss Enid get married," said Quin heartily. Then his thoughts flew after his departed Tuxedo and the gorgeous wing-toed pumps. "What 'll I have to wear?"

"It is to be a noon affair," reassured Mr. Chester. "Simple morning coat, you know, and light-gray tie."

Quin's ideas concerning a morning coat were extremely vague, and the possibility of his procuring one vaguer still; but the occasion was too portentous to admit of hesitation. He and Mr. Chester continued their walk to the far end of the shed, and then stood looking down at the coal cars being loaded from the yards.

"White gloves, I suppose?" observed Quin.

"Pearl gray, with very narrow stitching. I think that 's better taste, don't you?"

"Sure," agreed Quin. "Flower in the buttonhole, or anything like that?"

While this all-important detail was being decided, a clanging bell and the hiss of an engine announced the incoming train. Before the two waiting cavaliers could reach the gate, Eleanor Bartlett came through, laden with wraps and umbrellas.

"I like the way you meet us," she called out. "For mercy sake, help me." And she deposited her burden in Quin's outstretched arms. Then, as Mr. Chester strode past them with flying coat-tails in quest of Miss Enid, she burst out laughing.

"Say, you are looking great," said Quin, with devouring eyes, as he surveyed her over the top of his impedimenta.

"It 's more than you are." She scanned his face in dismay. "Have you been sick?"

"No, indeed. Never felt better."

"I know—it was nursing Cass that did it. Rose wrote me all about it. If you don't look better right away, I shall make you go straight to bed and I 'll come feed you chicken soup."

"My fever's rising this minute!" cried Quin, "I believe I've got a chill. Send for the ambulance!"

"Not till after the wedding. I 'll have you know I am to be Aunt Enid's bridesmaid."

"You 've got nothing on me," said Quin, "I 'm the best man!"

This struck them both as being so excruciatingly funny that they did not see the approaching caval-

cade, with Madam walking slowly at its head, until Quin heard his name called.

"Oh, dear," said Eleanor, "there they come. And I've got a thousand questions to ask you and a million things to tell you."

"Come here, young man, and see me walk!" was Madam's greeting. "Do I look like a cripple? Leg off at the knee, crutches for life? Bah! We fooled them, didn't we?"

Quin made a tremendous fuss over the old lady. He also threw the aunties into pleased confusion by pretending that he was going to kiss them, and occasioned no end of laughter and good-natured banter by his incessant teasing of Mr. Chester. He was in that state of effervescence that demanded an immediate outlet.

Madam found him so amusing that she promptly detailed him as her special escort.

"Eleanor can look after the baggage," she said, "and Isobel can look after Eleanor. The turtle-doves can take a taxi." And she closed her strong old fingers around Quin's wrist and pulled him forward.

He shot an appealing glance over his shoulder at Eleanor, who shook her head in exasperation; then he obediently conducted Madam to her carriage and scrambled in beside her.

"Now," she said, when he had got a cushion at

her back and a stool under her foot, "tell me: where 's Ranny—drunk as usual?"

"No, siree!" said Quin proudly. "Sober as usual. He has n't touched a drop since you went away."

She looked at him incredulously.

"Are you lying?"

"I am not."

Her hard, suspicious old face began to twitch and her eyelids reddened.

"This is your doing," she said gruffly. "You 've put more backbone into him than all the doctors together."

"That 's not all I 've done," said Quin. "What are you going to say when I tell you I 've sold him a farm?"

"A farm? You 've got no farm; and he had no money to buy it, if you had."

"That 's all right. He has had a farm for three months. You ought to see him—up at six o'clock every morning looking after things, and so keen about getting back to it in the evening that he never thinks about going to the club or staying in town."

"What 's all this nonsense you are talking?"

"It 's not nonsense. He 's bought a little place out near Anchordale. They are living there."

"And they did this without consulting me!" Madam's eyes blazed. "Why, he is no more capable of running a farm than a ten-year-old child! I

have fought it for years. He knew perfectly well if he told me I 'd stop it instantly. He will appeal to me to help out within six months, you 'll see! I sha'n't do it! I 'll show my children if they can do without me that I can go without them."

She was working herself into a fine rage. The aigrette on her bonnet quivered, and the black velvet band about her neck was getting so tight that it looked as if it could n't stand the strain much longer.

"Why did n't he write me?" she stormed. "Am I too old and decrepit to be consulted any more? Is he going to follow Enid's high-handed way of deciding things without the slightest reference to my wishes?"

"I expect he is," said Quin cheerfully. "You see, you can't stiffen a fellow's backbone, as you call it, for one thing and not another. When he found out he could stop drinking, he decided he could do other things as well. He 's started a chicken farm."

Madam groaned: "Of course. I never knew a fool that sooner or later didn't gravitate to chickens. He will get an incubator next."

"He has two already. He and Mrs. Ranny are studying out the whole business scientifically."

"And I suppose they 've got a rabbit hutch, and a monkey, and some white mice?"

"Not quite. But they 've got a nice place. Want to go out with me next Saturday and see 'em?"

"I do not. I 'm not interested in menageries. I never expect to cross the threshold."

Quin pulled up the cape that had slipped from her shoulder, and adjusted it carefully.

"When Mr. Ranny comes in to see you," he said, "I hope you won't ball him out right away. He 's awful keen on this stunt, you know. It sort of takes the place of the things he has given up."

Madam glared straight ahead of her for a few moments, then she said curtly:

"I 'll not mention it until he does."

"Oh, but I *want* you to. He 's as nervous as a witch about how you are going to take it. You see, he thinks more of your opinion than he does of anybody's, and he wants your approval. If you could jump right in and say you think it 's a bully idea, and that you are coming out to see what he has done, and——"

"Do you want me to lie?" Madam demanded fiercely.

"No," said Quin, laughing; "I am trying to warm you up to the project now, so you won't have to lie." Then, seeing her face relax a little, he leaned toward her and said in his most persuasive tone:

"See here, now! I did my best to straighten Mr. Ranny out. He 's making the fight of his life to keep straight. It 's up to you to stand by us. You don't want to pitch the fat back in the fire, do you?"

They had reached the big house on Third Avenue,

and the carriage was slowing up at the curbing. Quin, receiving no answer to his question, carefully helped Madam up the steps and into the house, where black Hannah was waiting to receive her.

"You can't come in," said Madam gruffly. "I am tired. I will see you some other time."

"All right," said Quin. "What time shall I come Saturday afternoon?"

"Saturday afternoon? Why then?"

"To go out to Mr. Ranny's farm."

For an instant they measured glances; then Quin began to laugh—a confident, boyish laugh full of teasing affection.

"Come on," he coaxed, "be a good scout. Let 's give 'em the surprise of their lives."

"You rascal, you!" she said, hitting at him with her cane. "I believe you are at the bottom of all this. Mind, I promise you nothing."

"You don't have to," he called back. "I can trust you. I 'll be here at three!"

He arrived on Saturday an hour early in the hope of seeing Eleanor, and was gloriously rewarded by thirty minutes alone with her in the big dark drawing-room. All the way up from the factory he had thought of the things he wanted to tell her—all the Martel news, the progress of affairs at Valley Mead, the fact that he had won his first-term certificate at the university, and above all about his promotion at Bartlett & Bangs. But Eleanor gave him

no chance to tell her anything. She was like a dammed-up stream that suddenly finds an outlet. Into Quin's sympathetic ears she poured her own troubles, talking with her hands and her eyes as well as her lips, exaggerating, dramatizing, laughing one minute, half crying the next.

The summer, it seemed, had been one long series of clashes with her grandmother. She had n't enjoyed one day of it, she assured him; that is, not a *whole* day, for of course there were some gorgeous times in between. Her friends had not been welcome at the house, and one (whom Quin devoutly hoped was Mr. Phipps) had been openly insulted. She had not been allowed to take part in the play given at the club-house, when it had been planned with her especially in mind for the leading rôle. She had even been forbidden to go to the last boat-house dance, because it was a moonlight affair, and grandmother had never heard of such a thing as dancing without lights.

"She has spent the entire summer nagging at me," Eleanor concluded. "I could n't do a thing to please her. If I stayed in she wanted me to go out; if I went out she thought I ought to stay in. If I put on one dress she invariably made me change it for another. And as for being late to meals, why, each time it happened you would have thought I 'd broken the ten commandments."

"Could n't you have pushed up the stroke and got

there on time?" asked Quin, whose army training made him inclined to sympathize with Madam at this point.

"No, I could not. I am always late. It 's a Martel trait—that 's why it infuriates grandmother. But it was n't any of these things I 've been telling you that caused the real trouble. It was her constant interference in my private affairs. I am simply sick of being dictated to about my choice of friends."

"You mean Mr. Phipps?"

She looked at him quickly. "How did you know?"

"Mrs. Ranny told me he was up there, and I guessed there was a shindy."

"I should say there was—for the entire three days he was there! If he had n't been big enough to rise above it and ignore grandmother, she would have succeeded in breaking up one of the most beautiful friendships of my life."

Quin absently twisted a corner of the corpulent sofa cushion which he held in his lap, before he asked cautiously:

"What is it you like so much in him, Miss Nell?"

Eleanor curled her feet under her on the sofa, and launched forth on a favorite theme:

"Well, to begin with, he 's the most cosmopolitan man I ever met."

"Cosmopolitan? How do you mean?"

"Awfully sophisticated. A sort of citizen of the world, you know."

"You mean he 's traveled a lot, knocked around in queer places, like me?"

"Oh, no; it is n't that. As a matter of fact, he has never been out of this country. But I mean that, wherever he 'd go, he would be at home."

"Yes," Quin admitted, with a grim smile; "that's where he was most of the time when he was in the army. What else do you like about him?"

"I sha'n't tell you. You are prejudiced, like all the rest. He says that only an artist can understand an artist."

"Meaning, I suppose, that he understands you?"

"Yes; and I believe I understand him. Of course I don't agree with him in all his ideas. But then, I 've been brought up in such a narrow way that I know I am frightfully conventional. He is awfully advanced, you know. Why don't you like him, Quin?"

Numerous concrete and very emphatic reasons sprang to Quin's lips. He would have liked nothing better than to answer her question fully and finally; but instead he only smiled at her and said:

"Why, I guess the main reason is because you do."

Eleanor looked at him dubiously: "No," she said; "it 's something besides that. The family have probably filled your ears with silly gossip. Mr. Phipps *was* wild at one time—he told me all about

it. But that 's ancient history; you can take my word for it."

Quin would have taken her word for almost anything when she looked at him with such star-eyed earnestness, but he was obliged to make an exception in the present instance.

"He 's nothing in my young life," he said indifferently. "What I want to know is whether you are home to stay?"

Eleanor glanced at the door, listened, then she said:

"I don't know yet. You see, Papa Claude is to be in New York this winter, finishing his play. He says if I will come on he will put me in the Kendall School of Expression and see that I get the right start. It 's the chance of a life-time, and I 'm simply wild to go."

"And Queen Vic won't hear of it?"

"Not for a second. She knows perfectly well that I can go on the stage the day I am twenty-one, yet through sheer obstinacy she refuses to advance me a penny to do as I like with before the 20th of next July."

"She don't do it for meanness," Quin ventured. "She 'd give you all she had if it came to a showdown. But none of 'em realize you are grown up; they are afraid to turn you loose."

"Well, I 've stood it as long as I intend to. I

made up my mind that I would stick it out until after Aunt Enid's wedding. It nearly breaks my heart to do anything to hurt her and Aunt Isobel; but even they are beginning to rebel against grandmother's tyranny."

"What do you mean to do?" asked Quin, with a sudden sinking of the heart.

"I am not sure yet; I have n't quite made up my mind. But I am not going to stay here. I am too unhappy, Quin, and with Aunt Enid gone——" Her voice broke, and as she caught her lip between her small white teeth she stared ahead of her with tragic eyes.

Quin laid his arm along the sofa, as close to her shoulders as he dared, and looked at her in dumb sympathy.

"Don't you think you might try a different tack with the old lady?" he ventured presently. "Even a porcupine likes to have its head scratched, and I think sometimes she 's kind of hungry for somebody to cotton up to her a bit. Don't you think you might——"

"Who left that front door open?" broke in a harsh, peremptory voice from the landing. "I don't care *who* opened it—I want it shut, and kept shut. Where 's Quinby Graham? I thought you said he was waiting."

Quin rose precipitately and made a dash for the

hall, while Eleanor discreetly disappeared through a rear door.

"Well," said Madam grimly, pulling on her gloves, "it is a novel experience to find a young person who has a respect for other people's time."

CHAPTER 21

FOR the next two weeks Eleanor made a heroic effort to follow Quin's advice and be nice to Madam. She wanted, with all her heart, to gain her point peacefully, and she also wanted Quin's approval of what she was doing. In spite of his obvious adoration, she frequently detected a note of criticism in his voice, that, while it piqued her, also stirred her conscience and made her see things in a new and disturbing light. For the first time, she began to wonder if she could be partly to blame for the friction that always existed between herself and her grandmother. She certainly had taken an unholy joy in flaunting her Martel characteristics in the old lady's face. It was not that she preferred to identify herself with her mother's family rather than with her father's. The Martel shiftlessness and visionary improvidence were quite as intolerable to her as the iron-clad conventions of the Bartletts. She could take correction from Aunt Isobel and Aunt Enid, but there was something in her grandmother's caustic comments that made her tingle with instant opposition, as a delicate vase will shiver at the sound of its own vibration.

During the days before the wedding she surprised herself by her docility and acquiescence in all that was proposed for her. She even accepted without demur the white swiss and blue ribbons that a week before she had considered entirely too infantile for an adult maid of honor. This particular exhibition of virtue was due to the exemplary behavior of the bride herself. Miss Enid had longed for the regulation white satin, tulle veil, and orange blossoms; but Madam had promptly cited the case of the old maid who waited so long to marry that her orange blossoms turned to oranges.

Miss Enid was married in a sober traveling dress, and carried a prayer-book. She and Mr. Chester stood in front of the drawing-room mantel, where twenty years before Madam had expressed her opinion concerning sentimental young fools who thought they could live on fifteen dollars a week.

The budding romance, snatched ruthlessly up and flung into the dust-heap of common sense, had lain dormant all these years, until Quinby Graham had stumbled upon its dried old roots, and planted them once again in the garden of dreams.

Why is it that we will breathlessly follow the callowest youth and the silliest maiden through the most intricate labyrinth of love, never losing interest until they drop safely into one another's arms, and yet when two seasoned, mellowed human beings tried by life and found worthy of the prize of love,

dare lift a sentimental lid or sigh a word of romance, we straightway howl with derision?

It was not until Eleanor stood beside the elderly bride that the affair ceased to be funny to her. For the first time, she saw something pathetic and beautiful in the permanence of a love that, starved and thwarted and blasted by ridicule, could survive the years and make two faded, middle-aged people like Aunt Enid and Mr. Chester eager to drain the dregs of life together, when they had been denied the good red wine.

Her eyes wandered from their worn, elated faces to the rows of solemn figures behind them. Madam, as usual, dominated the scene. Her portrait gazed in portentously from the hall; her marble bust gleamed from a distant corner; and she herself, the most resplendent person present, sat in a chair of state placed like a proscenium-box, and critically observed the performance.

"If she only *would n't* curl her lip like that!" thought Eleanor shudderingly; then she remembered her resolution and looked at Quin.

He too was looking preternaturally solemn, and his lips were moving softly in unison with Mr. Chester's. If Eleanor could have heard those inaudible responses she would have been startled by the words: "I, Quinby, take thee, Eleanor." But she only observed that he was lost in a day-dream, and that she had never seen him look so nice.

Indeed, he was a very different-looking person from the boy that six months ago had mortified her by his appearance at her Easter party in "the classiest coat in the market." The propriety of his garments made her suspect that Uncle Ranny had had a hand in their selection.

"And I like the way he 's got his hair slicked back," she thought. "I wonder how he ever managed it?"

After the wedding breakfast, which was a lavish one, and the departure of the bride and groom, for California, where they were to make their future home, Madam summoned Eleanor.

"There 's no use in you and Quin Graham staying here with all these fossils," she said, lowering her voice. "People hate to go home from a wedding almost as much as they do from a funeral! You two take this and go to a matinée."

This unexpected concession to Eleanor's weakness touched her deeply. She flew into the hall to tell Quin, and then rushed upstairs to change her dress.

"I believe the scheme is working!" she said joyously, as she and Quin sat in the theater waiting for the curtain to rise. "Grandmother has been peaches and cream to me all week. This morning she capped the climax by giving me a check for a hundred dollars to buy a gold mesh bag."

"A *what!*" cried Quin, aghast.

"A mesh bag. But I am not going to get it. I

sent the check to Rose. It has nearly killed me not to have a penny to send them all summer, and this came just in time. Have you heard about Myrna?"

"Being asked to spend the winter at Mrs. Ranny's? I should say I have! She 's the happiest kid alive."

"And grandmother has even stood for that! It 's a perfect scream to hear her bragging about 'my son's farm.' She will be talking about 'my daughter's husband' next."

"Queen Vic 's all right," Quin declared stoutly. "Her only trouble is that she 's been trying to play baseball by herself; she 's got to learn team-work."

The play happened to be "The Better 'Ole"; and from the moment the curtain rose Eleanor was oblivious to everything but the humor and pathos and glory of the story. She followed with ready tears and smiles the adventures of the three Tommies; she thrilled to the sentimental songs beside the stage camp fire; she laughed at the antics of the incomparable Corporal Bill. It was not until the second act that she became conscious of the queer behavior of her companion.

Quin sat hunched up in his wedding suit, his jaw set like a vise, staring solemnly into space with an expression she had never seen in his face before. He seemed to have forgotten where he was and whom he was with. His hand had crushed the program into a ball, and his breath came short, as

it always did when he was excited or over-exerted.

Eleanor, whose emotions up to now had been pleasantly and superficially stirred, suddenly saw the play from a new angle. With quick imagination she visualized the great reality of which all this was but a clever sham. She saw Quin passing through it all, not to the thunder of stage shrapnel and the glare of a red spot-light, but in the life-and-death struggle of those eighteen months in the trenches. Before she knew it, she too was gazing absently into space, shaken with the profound realization that here beside her, his shoulder touching hers, was one who had lived more in a day than she had ever lived in a life-time.

They said little during the last intermission, and the silence brought them closer together than any words could have done.

"It takes a fellow back—all this," Quin roused himself to say in half-apology.

"I know," said Eleanor.

They walked home in the autumn twilight in that exalted, romantic mood in which a good play leaves one. Now that the tension was over, it was quite possible to prolong the enjoyment by discussing the strong and weak points of the performance. Eleanor was surprised to find that Quin, while ignorant of the meaning of the word technic nevertheless had decided and worth-while opinions about every detail,

and that his comments were often startlingly pertinent.

They reached the Bartletts' before they knew it, and Quin sighed ruefully:

"I wish Miss Enid and Mr. Chester could get married every Wednesday! When can I see you again?"

"Some time soon."

"To-morrow night?"

"I am afraid that 's too soon."

"Friday?"

"No; I am going to a dance at the Country Club Friday night."

Still he lingered disconsolately on the lower step, unable to tear himself away.

"Do you know," he said, gaining time by presenting a grievance, "you never have danced with me but twice in your life?"

She looked at him dreamily.

"The funny thing is that I remember those two dances better than any I 've ever had with anybody else."

He came up the steps two at a time.

"What do you mean by that?" he demanded. "Are you joshing me?"

"No, honest. That New Year's eve with the blizzard raging outside, and that bright crowded hall, and all you boys just home from France. Do you remember the big blue parrots that swung in

hoops from the chandeliers? And that wonderful saxophone and the big bass drum!"

"Then it is n't *me* that you remember? Just a darned old parrot hanging on a hoop, and a saxophone and a drum!"

"You silly! Of course it 's you too! I remember every single thing you told me, and how terribly thrilled I was. This afternoon brought it all back. I shall never forget this, either. Not as long as I live!"

She started to put out her hand; but, seeing the look in Quin's eyes, she reconsidered and opened the door instead.

"So long," she said casually. "I 'll probably see you sometime next week. In the meanwhile I 'll be good to granny!"

CHAPTER 22

WHEN Eleanor reached the Country Club on Friday night, she found a box of flowers waiting for her in the dressing-room. It was the second box she had received that day. The first bore the conspicuous label, "Wear-Well Shoes," and contained a bunch of wild evening primroses wrapped in wet moss. With this more sophisticated floral offering was a sealed note which she opened eagerly:

Mademoiselle Beaux Yeux—[she read]:

Save all the dances after the intermission for me. I will reach L. at nine-thirty, get out to the club for a couple of hours with you, and catch the midnight express back to Chicago. Pin my blossoms close to your heart, and bid it heed what they whisper.

H. P.

Eleanor read the note twice, conscious of the fact that a dozen envious eyes were watching her. She considered this quite the most romantic thing that had happened to her. For a man like Mr. Phipps to travel sixteen hours out of the twenty-four just to dance with her was a triumph indeed. It made her think of her old friend Joseph, in the Bret Harte poem, who

Swam the Elk's creek and all that,
Just to dance with old Folingsbee's daughter,
The Lily of Poverty Flat.

Not that Eleanor felt in the least humble. She had never felt so proud in her life as she smiled a little superior smile and slipped the note in her bosom.

"Not orchids!" exclaimed Kitty Mason, poking an inquisitive finger under the waxed paper.

"Why not?" Eleanor asked nonchalantly. "They are my favorite flowers."

"But I thought the orchid king was in Chicago?"

"He is—that is, he was. He 's probably on the train now. I have just had a note saying he was running down for the dance and would go back to-night."

The news had the desired effect. Six noses, which were being vigorously powdered, were neglected while their owners burst forth in a chorus of exclamations sufficiently charged with envious admiration to satisfy the most rapacious débutante.

"I should think you 'd be perfectly paralyzed trying to think of things to talk to him about," said little Bessie Meed, who had not yet put her hair up. "Older men scare me stiff."

"They don't me," declared Lou Pierce; "they make me tired. Sitting out dances, and holding hands, and talking high-brow. When I come to a

dance I want to dance. Give me Johnnie Rawlings or Pink Bailey and a good old jazz."

Eleanor pinned on her orchids and moved away. The girls seemed incredibly young and noisy and crass. Less than six months ago she, too, was romping through the dances with Jimmy and Pink, and imagining that a fox-trot divided between ten partners constituted the height of enjoyment. Mr. Phipps had told her in the summer that she was changing. "The little butterfly is emerging from her chrysalis," was the poetic way he had phrased it, with an accompanying look that spoke volumes.

Once on the dance floor, however, she forgot her superior mood and enjoyed herself inordinately until supper-time. Just as she and Pink were starting for the refreshment room, she caught sight of a familiar graceful figure, standing apart from the crowd, watching her with level, penetrating eyes.

"Pink, I forgot!" she said hastily; "I 'm engaged for supper. I 'll see you later." And without further apology she slipped through the throng and joined Harold.

"Let 's get out of this," he said, lightly touching her bare arm and piloting her toward the porch.

"But don't you want any supper?" asked Eleanor, amazed.

"Not when I have you," whispered Harold.

Eleanor gave a regretful glance at a mammoth tray of sandwiches being passed, then allowed her-

self to be drawn out through the French window into the cool darkness of the wide veranda.

"Let 's sit in that car down by the first tee," Harold suggested. "It 's only a step."

Eleanor hesitated. One of the ten social commandments imposed upon her was that she was never to leave the porch at a Country Club dance. That the porch edge should be regarded as the limit of propriety had always seemed to her the height of absurdity; but so far she had obeyed the family and confined her flirtations to shadowy corners and dim nooks under bending palms.

"What 's the trouble?" Harold inquired solicitously. "The little gold slippers?"

"No—I don't mind the slippers; but, you see, I 'm not supposed to go off the porch."

"How ridiculous! Of course you are going off the porch. I have only one hour to stay, and I 've something very important to tell you."

"But why can't we sit here?" she insisted, indicating an unoccupied bench.

"Because those ubiquitous youngsters will be clamoring for you the moment the music begins. Have n't you had enough noise for one night? Perhaps you prefer to go inside and be pushed about and eat messy things with your fingers?"

"Now you are horrid!" Eleanor pouted. "I only thought——"

"You mean you *didn't* think!" corrected Harold,

putting the tip of his finger under her chin and tilting her face up to his. "You just repeated what you 'd been taught to say. Use your brains, Eleanor. What possible harm can there be in our quietly sitting out under the light of the stars, instead of on this crowded piazza with that distracting din going on inside?"

"Of course there is n't really."

"Well, then, come on"; and he led the way across the strip of dewy lawn and handed her into the car.

Eleanor experienced a delicious sense of forbidden joy as she sank on the soft cushions and looked back at the brilliantly lighted club-house. The knowledge that in many of those other cars parked along the roadway other couples were cozily twosing, and that not a girl among them but would have changed places with her, added materially to her enjoyment.

It was not that Harold Phipps was popular. She had to admit that he had more enemies than friends. But rumors of his wealth, his position, and his talent, together with his distinguished appearance, had made him the most sought after officer stationed at the camp. That he should have swooped down from his eagle flight with Uncle Ranny's sophisticated group to snatch her out of the pool of youthful minnows was a compliment she did not forget.

"Well," he said, lazily sinking into his corner of the car and observing her with satisfaction, "have n't

you something pretty to say to me, after I 've come all these miles to hear it?"

Eleanor laughed in embarrassment. It was much easier to say pretty things in letters than to say them face to face.

"There is one thing that I always have to say to you," she said, "and that 's thank you. These orchids are perfectly sweet, and the candy that came yesterday——"

"Was also *perfectly* sweet? Come, Eleanor, let 's skip the formalities. Were you or were you not glad to see me?"

"Why, of course I was."

"Well, you did n't look it. I am not used to having girls treat me as casually as you do. How much have you missed me?"

"Heaps. How 's the play coming on?"

"Marvelously! We 've worked out all the main difficulties, and I signed up this week with a manager."

"Not *really!* When will it be produced?"

"Sometime in the spring. I go on to New York next month to make the final arrangements. When do you go?"

"I don't know that I am going. I 'm trying my best to get grandmother's consent."

"You must go anyhow," said Harold. "I want you to have three months at the Kendall School, and then do you know what I am going to do?"

"What?" she asked with sparkling eagerness.

"I am going to try you out in 'Phantom Love.' You remember you said if I wrote a part especially for you that nothing in heaven or earth could prevent your taking it."

"And *have* you written a part especially for me?"

"I certainly have. A young Southern girl who moves through the play like a strain of exquisite music. The only trouble is that the rôle promises to be more appealing than the star's."

"That 's the loveliest thing I ever heard of anybody doing!" cried Eleanor, breathless with gratitude. "Does Papa Claude know?"

"Of course he knows. We worked it out together. I am going to find him a small apartment, so he can be ready for you when you come. It should n't be later than November the first."

Eleanor wore such a look as Joan of Arc must have worn when she first heard the heavenly voices. Her shapely bare arms hung limp at her sides, and her white face, with its contrasting black hair, shone like a delicate cameo against the darkness.

Harold, leaning forward with elbows on his knees, kept lightly touching and retouching his mustache.

"In the first act," he continued softly, "I 've put you in the Red Cross Uniform—the little blue and white one, you know, that you used to break hearts in out at the camp hospital. In the second act you are to be in riding togs, smart in every detail, some-

thing very chic, that will show your figure to advantage; in the last act I want you exactly as you are this minute—this soft clingy gold gown, and the gold slippers, and your hair high and plain like that, with the band of dull gold around it. I would n't change an inch of you, not from your head to your blessed little feet!"

As he talked Eleanor forgot him completely. She was busy visualizing the different costumes, even going so far as to see herself slipping through folds of crimson velvet to take insistent curtain calls. Already in imagination she was rich and famous, dispensing munificent bounty to the entire Martel family. Then a disturbing thought pricked her dream and brought her rudely back to the present. As long as her grandmother regarded her going to New York as a foolish whim, a passing craze, she might be wheedled into yielding; but at the first suggestion of a professional engagement, her opposition would become active and violent. Eleanor sighed helplessly and looked at Harold.

"What shall I do if grandmother refuses to send me?" she asked desperately.

"You can let me send you," he said quietly. "It 's folly to keep up this pretense any longer, Eleanor. You love me, don't you?"

"I—I like you," faltered Eleanor, "better than almost anybody. But I am never going to marry;

I don't think I shall ever care for anybody—that way."

He watched her with an amused practised glance. "We won't talk about it now," he said lightly. "We will talk instead of your career. You remember that night at Ran's when you recited for me? I can hear you now saying those lines:

> 'Or if thou think'st I am too quickly won
> I 'll frown and be perverse, and say thee nay.'

For days I was haunted by the beauty and subtlety of your voice, the unconscious grace of your poses, your little tricks of coquetry, and the play of your eyebrows."

"Did you really see all that in me the first night?"

"I saw more. I saw that, if taken in time, you were destined to be a great actress. I swore then and there that you should have your chance, and that I should be the one to give it to you."

"But——"

"No. Don't answer me now. You are like a little bud that 's afraid to open its petals. Once you get out of this chilling atmosphere of criticism and opposition, you will burst into glorious bloom."

"But it would mean a terrible break with the family. I don't believe I can——"

"Yes, you can. I know you better than you know yourself. If Madam Bartlett persists in refusing

to send you to New York, you are going to be big enough to let me do it."

He was holding her hand now, and talking with unusual earnestness. Eleanor thought she had never seen a greater exhibition of magnanimity. That he was willing to give all and ask for nothing, to be patient with her vacillations, and understand and sympathize with what everybody else condemned in her, touched her greatly. She turned to him impulsively.

"I 'll do whatever you say," she said. "You and Papa Claude go ahead and make the arrangements, and I promise you I 'll come."

Harold Phipps should have left it there; but Eleanor was never more irresistible than when she was in a yielding mood, and now, when she lifted starry eyes of gratitude, he tumbled off his pedestal of noble detachment, and drew her suddenly into his arms.

In an instant her soft mood vanished. She scrambled hastily to her feet and got out of the car.

"I am going in," she said abruptly. "I 'm cold."

Harold laughingly followed. "Cold?" he repeated in his laziest tone. "My dear girl, you could understudy the North Pole! However, it was my mistake; I 'm sorry. Shall we go in and dance?"

For the next half-hour he and Eleanor were the most observed couple on the floor. The "ubiquitous youngsters," seeing his air of proprietorship, forbore

to break in, and it was not until the last dance that Pink Bailey, looking the immature college boy he was, presented himself apologetically to take Eleanor home.

"Bring your car around, and she will be ready," said Harold loftily. Then he turned to Eleanor, "I shall expect a letter every day. You must keep me posted how things are going."

They were standing on the club-house steps now, and she was looking dreamily off across the golf links.

"Did you hear me?" he said impatiently.

"Oh, I was listening to the whip-poor-wills. They always take me back to Valley Mead. Write every day? Heavens, no. I hate to write letters."

"But you 'll write to me, you little ingrate! I shall send you such nice letters that you 'll have to answer them."

A vagrant breeze, with a hint of autumn, blew Eleanor's scarf across his shoulder, and he tenderly replaced it about her throat.

"Are you cold?" he asked solicitously.

Eleanor, under cover of the crowd that was surging about them, felt a sudden access of boldness.

"Not so cold as some people think," she said mischievously; then, without waiting for further good-by, she sped down the steps and into the waiting car.

CHAPTER 23

OF all the multitudinous ways in which Dan Cupid, Unlimited, does business, none is more nefarious than his course by correspondence. Once he has induced two guileless clients to plunge into the traffic of love letters, the rest is easy. Wild speculation in love stock, false valuations, hysterical desire to buy in the cheapest and sell in the dearest market, invariably follow. Before the end of the month Harold Phipps and Eleanor Bartlett were gambling in the love market with a recklessness that would have staggered the most hardened old speculator.

Harold, instead of being handicapped by his absence at the most critical point in his love affair, took advantage of it to exhibit one of his most brilliant accomplishments. He sent Eleanor a handsome tooled-leather portfolio to hold his letters, which he wrote on loose-leaf sheets and mailed unfolded. They were letters that deserved preservation, prose poems composed with infinite pains and copied with meticulous care. If the potpourri was at times redolent of the dried flowers of other men's loves, Eleanor was blissfully unaware of it. When he wrote of the lonesome October of his most im-

memorial year, or spoke of her pilgrim soul coming to him at midnight in the silence of the sleep-time, she thrilled with admiration for his genius.

Such literary masterpieces deserved adequate answers, and she found herself trying to make up in quantity what she lacked in quality. His letters always began, "Dearest Héloïse," or "Mélisande," or "Baucis," or "Isolde"; and, rather than acknowledge her ignorance of these classic allusions, she looked them up and sent her answers to "Dear Abélard," or "Pelléas," or "Philemon," or "Tristan," as the case demanded. She indited her missives with a dainty gold pen engraved with an orchid, which Harold had requested her never to profane by secular use.

The correspondence, while throbbing with emotion, was not by any means devoid of practical details. Harold lost no opportunity of urging Eleanor to remain firm in her resolve to go to New York. It would be sheer folly, he pointed out, to give up the chance of a professional début, a chance that might not come again in years. He pointed out that her grandfather had changed all his plans on the strength of her coming, and would be utterly heartbroken if she failed to keep her promise. He delicately intimated that her failure to take the part he had so laboriously written for her might seal the fate of "Phantom Love" and prove the downfall of both its creators.

His conclusion to all these specious arguments was that the only way out of the tangle was for her to consent to a nominal engagement to him that would bind her to nothing, and yet would give him the right to send her to New York if Madam Bartlett refused to do so. In answer to Eleanor's doubts and misgivings, he assured her in polyphonic prose that he knew her far better than she knew herself, and that he would be "content to wait at the feet of little Galatea, asking nothing, giving all, until the happy day when she should wake to life and love and the consciousness that she was wholly and happily his."

And Galatea read his letters with increasing ardor and slept with them under her pillow. It was all so secret and romantic, this glorious adventure rushing to fulfilment, under the prosy surface of every-day life. Of course she did not want to be married —not for ages and ages; but to be engaged, to be indefinitely adored by a consummate lover like Harold Phipps, who so beautifully shared her ambition, was an exciting and tempting proposition. Like most girls of her type, when her personal concerns became too complex for reason, she abandoned herself to impulse. She merely shut her eyes and allowed herself to drift toward a destination that was not of her choosing. Like a peripatetic Sleeping Beauty, she moved through the days in a sort of trance, waiting liberation from her thraldom, but fearing to put her fate to the

test by laying the matter squarely and finally before her grandmother.

It was easy enough to drop out of her old round of festivities. She had been away all summer, and new groups had formed with which she took no trouble to ally herself. Her friends seemed inordinately young and foolish. She wondered how she had ever endured the trivial chatter of Kitty Mason and the school-boy antics of Pink Bailey and Johnnie Rawlings. After declining half a dozen invitations she was left in peace, free to devote all her time to composing her letters, to poring over plays and books about the theater, or to sitting listless absorbed in day-dreams.

The one old friend who refused to be disposed of was Quinby Graham. On one pretext or another he managed to come to the house almost every day, and he seldom left it without managing to see her. Sometimes when she was in the most arduous throes of composition, the maid would come to her door and say: "Mr. Quin's downstairs, and he says can you come to the steps a minute—he 's got something to show you?" Or Miss Isobel would pause on the threshold to say: "Quinby is looking for you, Eleanor. I think it is something about a new tire for your automobile."

And Eleanor would impatiently thrust her letter into a desk drawer and do downstairs, where she would invariably get so interested in what Quin had

to say to her or to show her that she would forget to come up again.

Sometimes they went out to Valley Mead together for week-ends. On those days Eleanor not only failed to write to Harold, but also failed to think about him. The excitement of seeing what new wonders had been wrought since the last visit, of scouring the woods for nuts and berries, of going on all-day picnics to a neighboring hill-top, made her quite forget her castles in the air. She descended from the clouds of art and under Quin's tutelage learned to fry chops and bacon and cook eggs in the open. She got her face and hands smudged and her hair tumbled, and she forgot all about enunciating clearly and holding her poses. So abandoned was she to what Harold called her "bourgeois mood" that she was conscious of nothing but the sheer joy of living.

Often when she and Quin were alone together, she longed to take him into her confidence. She was desperately in need of counsel, and his level head and clear judgments had solved more than one problem for her. But she realized that, in spite of the heroic effort he was making to keep within bounds, he was nevertheless liable to overflow into sentiment with the slightest encouragement. Confession of her proposed flight, moreover, involved an explanation of her relation to Harold Phipps,

and upon that point Quin could not be counted to sympathize.

With the first of November came a letter that brought matters to a crisis. Claude Martel wrote that he must know immediately the date of her arrival in New York, since the place he had bespoken for her at the Kendall School of Expression could no longer be held open; he must also give a definite answer about the apartment.

Eleanor received the letter one Saturday as she was starting to a tea. All afternoon she listened to the local chatter about her as a lark poised for flight might listen to the twittering of house sparrows. Her mind was in a ferment of elation and doubt, of trepidation and joyful anticipation. The moment she had longed for and yet dreaded was at hand.

Returning across Central Park in the dusk, she rehearsed what she was going to say to her grandmother. The moment for approaching her had never seemed more propitious. Ever since she had accepted Quin's advice and "cottoned up" to the old lady, relations between them had been amazingly amicable. Her willingness to stay at home in the evening and take Miss Enid's place as official reader and amanuensis had placed her in high favor, and Madam, not to be outdone in magnanimity, had allowed her many privileges.

Now that there seemed some ground for the hope that she might gain her grandmother's consent to

the New York proposition, Eleanor realized how ardently she wanted it. It was not the money alone, it was her moral support and approval—hers and Aunt Isobel's. Aunt Enid would understand, had understood in a way; so would Uncle Ranny and Aunt Flo. As for Quin Graham——

She heard a cough near by, and turning saw a couple sitting on a bench half hidden in the heavy shrubbery. Their backs were toward her, and she noticed that the girl's hand rested on the man's shoulder and that their heads were bent in intimate conversation. The next instant she recognized Rose Martel's hat and the dim outline of Quin's troubled profile.

Turning sharply to the right, she hurried up through the pergola and out into the avenue. She wondered why she was so unaccountably angry. Rose and Quin had a perfect right to sit in the square at twilight and talk as much as they liked. It was not her business, anyhow, she told herself; she ought to be glad for poor Rose to have any diversion she could get after being in that hideous store all day. She didn't blame Rose one bit. But if Quin thought as much of somebody else as he pretended to, she couldn't see what he would have to say to another girl out here in the park at twilight, especially a girl that he saw three times a day at home! Could there be anything between them? She had scorned the idea when it was once tentatively sug-

gested to her by Harold Phipps. Of *course* there could n't. And yet——

So preoccupied was she with these disturbing reflections that she almost forgot the real business in hand until she stood on her own doorstep waiting to be admitted.

"Old Miss says for you to come up to her room the minute you git in," Hannah said, with an ominous note in her voice.

"What 's the matter, Hannah? Uncle Ranny?"

"Lord, no, honey! Mr. Ranny's behavin' himself like a angel. Hit was somethin' that come in the mail. Miss Isobel she don't know, and I don't know; but Old Miss certainly has got it in fer somebody."

Eleanor's new-found confidence promptly deserted her, and she hastily took stock of her own shortcomings. Of course she was writing daily to Harold, but the matter of her private correspondence had been threshed out during the summer and she had emerged battered but victorious. Aside from that, she could think of no probable cause she had given for offense.

In the hall she met Miss Isobel.

"Mother has been asking for you, dear," she said in a voice heavy with premonition. "She 's very much upset about something."

Eleanor anxiously mounted the stairs. It was evidently not a propitious moment to present her

case; and yet, Papa Claude must have an answer within twenty-four hours. At the door of Madam's room she hesitated. Then she took the small remnant of her courage in both hands and entered.

Madam was sitting at her desk under the crystal chandelier, with a severity of expression that suggested nothing less than a court martial. Without speaking she waved Eleanor to a seat, and began searching through her papers. The light fell full on her high white pompadour and threw the deep lines about her grim mouth into heavy relief.

"Do you remember," she began ponderously, "a check I gave you the day of Enid's wedding?"

"Yes, grandmother."

"Well, where is the bag you bought with it?"

Evasion had so often been Eleanor's sole weapon of defense that she seized it now.

"I—I have n't bought it yet," she faltered; then she added weakly: "I have n't seen any I particularly cared about."

"You still have the money?"

"Well—I 've spent some of it."

"How much?"

"I don't know that I remember exactly."

Madam's lip curled.

"Perhaps I can stimulate your memory," she said, running her fingers through a bunch of canceled checks. "Here is the check I gave you, indorsed to Rose Martel."

Eleanor flushed crimson. The imputation of untruthfulness was one to which she was particularly sensitive. Her fear of her grandmother had taught her early in life to take refuge in subterfuge, a shelter that she heartily despised but which she still clung to. In her desire to meet Rose's imperative need, she had passed her gift on to her, with the intention of saving enough from her own allowance to get the mesh bag later. The fact that the canceled check would be returned to her grandmother had never occurred to her.

"So *that's* where my money has been going!" cried Madam. "They've succeeded in working me through you, have they? Just as they succeeded in working Ranny through Quinby Graham."

"No—no, grandmother! Please listen! They have never asked me for a penny. But when I found out the terrible time they'd been having, the children sick all summer and Cass down with typhoid—why, if it hadn't been for Quin——"

"So they sponged on him too, did they? He's a bigger fool than I gave him credit for being."

"But they *didn't* sponge. He is Cass's best friend, and he was glad to help. He and Rose did all the nursing themselves."

"Yes, I heard about it. In the house alone for six weeks. That doesn't speak very well for her reputation."

"Grandmother! You've no right to say that!

Rose may talk recklessly and do foolish things, but she would n't do anything wrong for the world."

"Well, if she did, she would n't be the first member of her family to compromise a man so that he had to marry her."

"What do you mean?" demanded Eleanor, quivering with indignation.

"That 's neither here nor there," said Madam. "There 's enough rottenness in the present without raking up the past. But one thing is certain: if they ask you for money again——"

"I tell you, they did n't ask me!"

"Not in so many words, perhaps, but they worked on your sympathies. I know them! As for Claude Martel, he would want nothing better than have you traveling around in some Punch and Judy show. But I scotched that nonsense once and for all. As for their bleeding you for money,"—she rose and crushed the check in her hand,—"I guess I know a way to stop that."

Eleanor rose too, and faced her. She was very pale now, her anger having reached a white heat.

"My mother's people may be poor," she said deliberately, "but they are n't beggars, and at least they 've come by what they have honestly."

It was Madam's turn to flinch. A certain famous law-suit in the history of Bartlett & Bangs had brought out some startling testimony, and the subject was one to which reference was never allowed in

Madam's presence. At Eleanor's words the whirlwind of her wrath let loose. Her words hurtled like flying missiles in a cyclone. She lashed herself into a fury, coming back to Eleanor again and again as the cause of all her trouble.

"I tried giving you your head," she raged in conclusion; "I let you work through that crazy stage fever; I gave in about that man Phipps coming up to Maine, in the hope that you 'd find out what a fool he is. That was n't enough! You had to write to him. Very well, said I; go ahead and write to him. I flattered myself that you might develop a little sense. But I was mistaken. You have n't got the judgment of a ten-year-old child. Therefore I intend to treat you like a child. From this time on you are not to write to him at all. And you 'll get no allowance. I 'll buy you what you need, and you 'll account for all the pin-money you spend, down to every postage stamp. Do you understand?"

Eleanor was by this time at the door, standing with her hand on the knob, straight, pale, and defiant, but quivering in every limb. She felt as beaten, bruised, and humiliated as if the violence directed against her had been physical. A sick longing surged over her for Aunt Enid, into whose arms she could rush for comfort. But there was no Aunt Enid to turn to, and it was no use seeking Aunt

Isobel, whose sole advice in such a crisis was to apologize and propitiate.

Catching her breath in a long, sobbing sigh, Eleanor rushed down the gloomy hall and shut herself in her room. For ten minutes she sat at her desk, staring grimly at the wall, with her hands gripped in her lap. She was like a frenzied prisoner, determined to escape but with no destination in view. Suddenly her eyes fell on an unopened letter on her blotting-pad. She tore off the envelop and read it twice. For another five minutes she stared at the wall. Then she seized her pen and dashed off a note. It took but a few minutes after that to change her light gown for a dark one and to fling some things into a suit-case. Just as dinner was being announced, she slipped down the back stairs and out of the side door into the somber dusk of the November evening.

CHAPTER 24

QUIN'S life at the factory these past three weeks had been full of new and engrossing business complications. Mr. Bangs seemed bent upon trying him out in various departments, each change bringing new and distracting duties. Just what was the object of the proceeding Quin had no idea; but he realized that he was being singled out and experimented with, and he applied to each new task the accumulated knowledge and experience of those that had gone before. It was all very exciting and gratifying to a person possessed of an inordinate ambition to have a worthy shrine ready the moment his goddess evinced the slightest willingness to occupy it.

"Old Iron Jaw's got his optic on you for something," said Miss Leaks, the stenographer. "Maybe he wants you to pussy-foot around in Shields' shoes and do his dirty work for him."

"Well, he's got another guess coming," said Quin; but her remark disturbed him. Of course it was no concern of his how the firm did business, but more than once he had been called upon to ne-

gotiate some delicate matter that was not at all to his liking.

"See here, young man," Mr. Bangs said upon one of these occasions, "I am not paying you for advice. You are here to carry out my orders and to make no comments."

"That 's all right," Quin agreed good-naturedly; "but I got a conscience that was trained to stand on its hind legs and bark at a lie."

"The quicker you muzzle it the better," said Mr. Bangs. "You can't do business these days by the Golden Rule."

On the Saturday when Eleanor saw Quin in the park with Rose Martel, the factory had been in the throes of one of its most violent upheavals. Some weeks before the old steam engine had been replaced by an expensive electric drive. There had been much interest manifested in the installation of the modern motor, and Quin, with his natural love of machinery, had rejoiced that his duties as shipping clerk required him to be present at the unpacking. He and Dirk, the foreman, never tired of discussing the perfection of each particular feature. But a few days after the departure of the installation foreman, the new motor burnt out, necessitating the shutting down of the factory and causing much inconvenience.

Dirk was beside himself with rage. He declared that something heavy had been dropped upon the

armature winding, and he blamed every one who could have been responsible, and some who could not. In the midst of his tirade he was summoned to the office, where he was closeted for more than an hour with Mr. Bangs and Mr. Shields. When he emerged, it was with the avowed belief that the armature had been defective when received. This sudden change of front, taken in connection with the fact that the third payment was due on the motor in less than sixty days, set every tongue wagging.

Quin was in no way involved in the transaction; but, as usual, he had an emphatic opinion, which he did not hesitate to express.

"I don't know what 's got into Dirk!" he said indignantly to Mr. Shields, the traffic manager, as they left the office together. "He knows the injury to the armature was done in our shop and that we are responsible for it."

"I guess Dirk 's like the rest of us," said Shields bitterly; "he knows a lot he can't tell."

"What do you mean? Do you think it was a frame-up?"

"Well, we don't call it that. But when the boss gets in a hole, somebody 's got to pull him out. I 'm getting mighty sick of it myself. Wish to the Lord I could pull up stakes as Mr. Bartlett and Mr. Chester did."

It was not until they separated that Quin's thoughts left the disturbing events of the day and

flew to something more pleasing. For two weeks now he had had to content himself with chance interviews with Eleanor, meager diet for a person with an omnivorous appetite; but to-night there was the prospect for a long, uninterrupted evening. Since the day of Miss Enid's wedding he had found her perplexed and absent-minded; but the fact that she always had a smile for him, and that nothing was seen or heard of Harold Phipps, sufficed to satisfy him.

When he started across Central Park the sun was just setting, and he turned off the main path and dropped down on a bench to rest for a moment. He had acquired a taste for sunsets at a tender age, having watched them from many a steamer's prow. He knew how the harbor of Hongkong brimmed like a goblet of red wine, how Fujiyama's snow-capped peak turned rose, he knew how beautiful the sun could look through a barrage of fire. But it was of none of these that he thought as he sat on the park bench, his arms extended along the back, his long legs stretched out, and his eyes on a distant smokestack. He was thinking of a country stile and a girl in white and green, in whose limpid eyes he watched the reflected light of the most wonderful of all his sunsets.

For the third time since leaving the office, he consulted his watch. Six-thirty! Another hour and a half must be got through before he could see her.

A rustle of leaves behind him made him look up, but before he could turn his head two hands were clapped over his eyes. Investigation proved them to be feminine, and he promptly took them captive.

"It 's Rose?" he guessed.

"Let me go!" she laughed; "somebody will see you."

She slipped around the bench and dropped down beside him.

"I was coming out the avenue and spied you mooning over here by yourself. What 's the trouble?"

"No trouble at all. Just stopped to get my wind a bit—and watch the sunset."

"I think you are working too hard." She looked at him with anxious solicitude. "I 've a good notion to put you on buttermilk again."

"Good work! Put me on anything you like except dried peaches and wienies."

"And you need more recreation," Rose persisted. "It 's not good for anybody to work all day and go to school at night. What 's the matter with us getting Cass and Fan Loomis and going down to Fontaine Ferry to-night?"

"Can't do it," said Quin with ill-concealed pride. "Got a date with Miss Eleanor Bartlett."

Rose sat silent for a moment, stirring the dead leaves with her shabby boot; then she turned and laid her hand on his shoulder.

"Quin," she said, "I am worried sick about Nell and Harold Phipps."

Quin, who had been trying to beguile a squirrel into believing that a pebble was a nut, looked up sharply.

"What do you mean?" he said. "She has n't seen him since last summer, and she never mentions his name."

"*Don't* she? She hardly talks about anything else. She writes to him all the time and wears his picture in her watch!"

"Do you know that?"

"Of course I know it. She can't talk about him at home, so she pours it all out to me."

"But have n't you told her what you know about him?"

"I 've hinted at it, but she won't believe me because she knows I hate him. I wanted to tell her about what he said to me, and about that nurse he got into trouble out at the hospital; but I was afraid it might make an awful row and spoil everything for Papa Claude."

"I don't care who it spoils things for! She 's got to be told." Quin's eyes were blazing.

"But perhaps if we leave it alone he 'll get tired of her. They say he keeps after a girl until he gets her engaged to him, then drops her."

"He 'd never drop Miss Nell. No man would. He 'd be trying to marry her."

"But what can we *do?* The more people talk about him, the more she 's going to take up for him. That 's Nell all over."

"Could n't Mr. Martel——"

"Papa Claude 's as much taken in as she is. You remember the night over home when he talked about his lovely detached soul? He never sees the truth about anybody."

"Well, he 's going to see the truth about this. If you don't write to him to-night and tell him the kind of man Mr. Phipps is, I will!"

"Wait till to-morrow. I 'll have another round with Nell. I 've got some proof that I think she 'll have to believe."

Quin rose restlessly. He wanted to go to the Bartletts' at once, if only to stand guard at the gate against the danger that threatened Eleanor.

"Are n't you coming home to supper?" asked Rose.

"No," he said absently; "I don't want any supper."

For an hour he paced the streets, trying to think things out. His burning desire was to go straight to Eleanor and lay the whole matter before her. But according to his ethics it was a poor sport who would discredit a rival, especially on hearsay. He must leave it to Rose, and let her furnish the proof she said she possessed.

At eight o'clock he rang the Bartletts' bell, and was surprised when Miss Isobel opened the door.

"She is n't here," she said in answer to his inquiry. "We cannot imagine what has become of her. She must have gone out just before dinner, and she has not returned."

"Did n't she say where she was going?"

"No." Miss Isobel's lips worked nervously; then she drew Quin into the dining-room and closed the door. "She and mother had a very serious misunderstanding, and—and I 'm afraid mother was a little severe. I did not know Eleanor was gone until she failed to come down to dinner. I 've just sent Hannah up to telephone my brother to see if she is there."

"She probably is." Quin spoke with more assurance than he felt. "About what time did she leave here?"

"It must have been between six-thirty and seven. How long would it take her to get out to Ranny's?"

"Depends on whether she went in her machine or a street-car," said Quin evasively. "Besides, she may have gone to the Martels'."

"I don't think so," said Miss Isobel, twisting her handkerchief in her slender fingers; "because, you see, she—she took her suit-case."

For the first time, Quin's face reflected the anxiety of Miss Isobel's.

When Hannah returned she reported that no one answered the telephone at the Randolph Bartletts'.

"Suppose the child gets there and nobody is at home!" groaned Miss Isobel, whose imagination always rushed toward disaster. "What on earth shall I do?"

"Leave it to me," said Quin. "I 'll run around to the Martels', and if she 's not there I 'll go out to Valley Mead. She 's sure to be one place or the other."

"Of course she must be; but I 'm so anxious! You will go right away, won't you? And telephone the minute you find out where she is. Then I 'll tell mother I gave her permission to go."

Miss Isobel pushed him toward the door as she spoke:

"You—you don't think anything dreadful could have happened to her, do you?"

Quin patted her shoulder reassuringly.

"Of course not," he blustered. "She 'll probably be in before I get around the corner. If not, I bet I find her at the Martels', toasting marshmallows."

In spite of his assumed confidence, he ran every step of the way home. As he turned the corner he saw with dismay that the house was dark. His call in the front hall brought no answer. He turned on the light, and saw an unstamped letter addressed to himself on the table. The fact that the writing was Eleanor's did not tend to decrease his alarm.

He tore off the envelop and read:

Dear Quin:

Grandmother has said things to me that I can never forgive as long as I live. I am leaving her house in a few moments forever. By the time you get this I shall be on my way to Chicago to join Harold Phipps. We have been engaged for two weeks. I did not mean to marry him for years and years, but I've simply *got* to do something. He cares more for me and my career than any one else in the world, and he understands me better than anybody.

You'll get this when you go home to supper, and I want you to telephone Aunt Isobel right away and tell her I won't be home to-night. She will think I am with Rose and that will keep her from being anxious. I don't care how anxious grandmother is! To-morrow I'll send them a wire from Chicago telling them I'm married.

Dear Quin, I know this is a terribly serious step, and I know you won't approve; but I am unhappy enough to die, and I don't know where else to turn, or what to do. Some day I hope you will know Mr. Phipps better, and see what a really fine man he is. Do try to comfort Aunt Isobel, and make her understand. Please don't hate me, but try to forgive your utterly miserable friend,

E. M. B.

Quin stood staring at the letter. He felt as he had on that August day when the flying shrapnel struck him—the same intense nausea, the deadly exhaustion, the bursting pain in his head. Involuntarily he raised his hand to the old wound, half expecting to feel the blood stream again through his fingers.

"Married! Married!" he kept repeating to himself dazedly. "Miss Nell gone to marry that man, that scoundrel!"

He sat down on the stair steps and tried to hold the thought in his mind long enough to realize it.

But Phipps himself kept getting in the way: Phipps the slacker, as he had known him in the army; Phipps the condescending lord of creation, who had refused to take his hand at Mr. Ranny's; and oftenest of all Phipps the philanderer, who had insulted Rose Martel, and been responsible for the dismissal of more than one nurse from the hospital. The mere thought of such a man in connection with Eleanor Bartlett made Quin's strong fingers clench around an imaginary neck and brought beads of perspiration to his forehead.

"Something's got to be done!" he thought wildly, staggering to his feet. "I got to stop it; I got——"

Then the sense of his helplessness swept over him, and he sat down again on the steps. She had evidently left on the eight-o'clock train for Chicago, and it was now eight-thirty. There was nothing to be done. What a fool he had been to go on hoping and daring! She had told him again and again that she didn't care for him; but she had also told him that she did not intend to marry anybody. But if she had n't cared for him, why had she come to him with her troubles, and followed his advice, and wanted his good opinion? Why had she looked at him the way she had the day of Miss Enid's wedding, and said she remembered her dances with him better than those with anybody else? In bitterness of spirit he went over all the treasured words and glances he had hoarded since the day he met her.

He did n't believe she loved Harold Phipps! She did n't love anybody—yet. But, in her mad desire to escape from home, she had taken the first means that presented itself. She had stepped into a trap, from which he was powerless to rescue her.

In a sudden anguish of despair he flung himself face downward on the steps and gave way to his anguish. There was no one to see and no one to hear. All the doubts and discouragements, the humiliations and disappointments, through which he had passed to win her, came back to mock him, now he had lost her. The world had suddenly become an intolerable vacuum in which he gasped frantically for breath.

What was the use in going on? Why not put an end to everything? He could make it appear an accident. Nobody would be the wiser. The temptation was growing stronger every second, when he suddenly remembered Miss Isobel.

"I forgot she was waiting," he muttered, stumbling into the sitting-room and fumbling for the telephone. "Miss Nell said I was to keep her from being anxious—she wanted me to comfort her. But what in hell can I say!"

CHAPTER 25

AT nine-thirty Edwin came in and passed up the creaking stairs. Ten minutes later Cass limped by the door, stopping a moment in the pantry to get a bite to eat. Quin sat motionless in the dark sitting-room and made no sign. He was waiting for Rose, with a dumb dependence the strongest man feels for the understanding feminine in times of crisis.

When he heard her cheerful voice calling good night to Fan Loomis, the clock was just striking ten.

"Quin! What is it?" she cried in alarm the moment she saw his face. "Is anybody dead?"

"Worse! She 's run away to get married!"

"Not Myrna?"

"No. Miss Nell. She left to-night for Chicago to marry Phipps!"

"But she can't!" cried Rose wildly. "It 's got to be stopped. He 's not fit to marry anybody! We 've got to stop her!"

"I tell you, it 's too late! She left on the eight-o'clock train."

"Who said so? Are you sure? Do the Bartletts know?"

"Nobody knows but you and me; nobody must know—yet. Maybe she 'll change her mind."

"But the Bartletts will miss her. Have they called up?"

"I 'phoned Miss Isobel that she was all right and she 'd telephone in the morning. All right! Good God, Rose, can't we do something?"

"If I could get Harold Phipps's address I 'd send him a telegram that would scare the wits out of him."

Quin brushed the suggestion aside. "It 's no use wasting time on him; we 've got to reach her."

"But how can we? Let me think. Do you suppose I could send her a telegram to be delivered on the train? *Anything* that would make her wait until somebody could get to her."

"I 'll get to her," Quin cried. "I 'll search every hotel in Chicago. You send the telegram and I 'll start on the next train."

A hurried consultation of time-tables showed that a Pennsylvania train left in ten minutes, and was due in Chicago the next morning at seven-thirty.

"You can't make that," said Rose, but even as she spoke Quin was rushing for the door.

"Have you got enough money?" she called after him.

His meteor flight was checked. Ramming his

hands in his pockets, he pulled out a handful of silver.

"Wait!" cried Rose, speeding up to her room and and returning with a small roll of bills. "It 's what 's left of Nell's check. Good-by—I 'll send the telegram."

Ten minutes later, as the night express for Chicago pulled out of the station, the bystanders were amused by the sight of a bare-headed young man dashing madly through the gate and across the railroad tracks. The train had not yet got under way, but its speed was increasing and the runner's chances lessened every moment.

"He 'll never catch it," said the gate-keeper. "He 'd lost his wind before he got here."

"He ain't lost his nerve," said a negro porter, craning his neck in lively interest. "He's lettin' hisself go lak a Derby-winner on de home stretch!"

"Has he give up?" asked the gate-keeper, turning aside to stamp a ticket.

"Not him. He 's bound to ketch dat train ef it busts a hamstring. He 's done got holt de rear platform! He 's pullin' hisself up! There! I tole you so! I knowed he was the kind of fellow that gits what he goes after."

Quin caught the train, but he paid for his run. A brakeman found him collapsed on the platform, in such a paroxysm of coughing that the train had covered many miles before he was sufficiently re-

covered to go inside and take a seat. But, even as he leaned back limp and exhausted, he was conscious of a dull satisfaction that he was traveling toward Eleanor. He refused to think of the absurdity of his wild quest, of her probable anger at his interference. He fought back his despair, his jealousy, his inordinate fear. The one thing necessary now was to get to her—to be on hand in case she needed him.

Through the interminable hours of the night almost every breath came with an effort, but he scarcely heeded the fact. With characteristic persistence he forced himself to follow her steps in imagination from the time she left home until she reached her destination. The eight-o'clock sleeper that she had taken was due in Chicago at five-thirty. She would probably not leave it before seven at the earliest, and by that time Rose's telegram ought to have reached her. He tried to picture its effect on her. Much would depend upon the time that intervened between its reception and her seeing Mr. Phipps. If he met her, as he probably would, he would sweep aside all her doubts. If, on the other hand, Eleanor had time to think the matter over, her innate common sense might make her wait at least until she heard what Rose had to tell her. On the bare chance of his not meeting her, what would she do? Take the next train home? Go to his apartment? Go to a hotel alone?

Plan after plan rushed through Quin's mind, only to be impatiently discarded. He sat tense and still, with his clenched hands rammed in his pockets and his eyes fixed on the black square of the window. Sometimes dim objects flew past, and now and then sharp, vivid lights stabbed the darkness. Once the smelting-pots of a huge iron foundry belched forth a circle of swirling flames, and for a moment wrenched his mind off his problems. Then the regular pounding of the wheels on the rails recalled him.

"She 's gone to be married. Gone—to be married. Gone—to be married."

He realized that they had been saying it in monotonous rhythm ever since he started—that they would go on saying it through eternity.

Suddenly the train jarred to a standstill. Figures with lanterns emerged through a cloud of steam and stood under his window.

"Guess we got a hot-box," said a sleepy passenger across the aisle. "That means I 'll miss my connection."

Quin got up and went out on the platform. He was filled with rage at the lazy deliberation with which the men set about their task. He longed to wrench the tools out of their hands and do the job himself.

"How much will this put us behind?" he demanded of the conductor.

"Oh, not more than twenty minutes. We 'll make some of it up before morning."

Once more under way, Quin dropped into a troubled sleep. He dreamed that he was pursuing a Hun over miles of barbed-wire entanglements; but when he overtook him and forced him to the ground, the face under the steel helmet was the smiling, supercilious face of Harold Phipps. He woke up with a start and stretched his cold limbs. The black square of the window had turned to gray; arrows of rain shot diagonally across it. He realized for the first time that he had neither hat nor overcoat, but he did not care. In ten minutes more he would be in Chicago, in the same city with Eleanor.

Notwithstanding the fact that it was pouring rain when the train pulled into the station, Quin stood on the lowest step of the platform, ready to alight.

"Say, young fellow, you forgot your hat," said a man behind him.

"Did n't have any," answered Quin.

"I got an extra cap if you want it," offered the man obligingly.

Quin, already on the platform, caught it as the man tossed it out to him. Dashing through the depot, he hurled himself into a taxi.

"Monon Station!" he shouted, "and drive like the devil."

Just what kind of chauffeur the devil is has never

been demonstrated, but if that taxi-driver, urged on by Quin, was his counterpart, it is safe to infer that there are no traffic laws in Hades. In spite of the fact that the streets were like glass from the driving rain, and the wind-shield a gray blur, in spite of the fact that a tire went flat on a rear wheel, that decrepit old taxi rose to the occasion and made the transit in record time.

Arrived at the station, Quin thrust a bill into the driver's hand and dashed down the steps to the lower level. In answer to his frenzied inquiry he was told that the Express had come in two hours before and that the passengers had probably all left the sleeper by this time.

Nothing daunted, he rushed out to the tracks and accosted a porter who was sweeping out the rear coach.

"Yas, sir, this is it," answered the negro. "Young lady? Yas, sir; there was five or six of 'em on board last night. Pretty? Yas, sir, they was all pretty—all but one, and she was n't so bad looking."

"Did one of them get a telegram in the night or this morning?"

The porter's face brightened. "Yas, sir. Boy come through soon as we got in. Had a wire for young lady in lower six."

"Do you know what time she left the car?"

"About half hour ago, I should say. Party she

was expecting to meet her did n't turn up, and I had to git her a red-cap to carry her suit-case. Thanky, sir."

Quin tore back to the station and dashed through the waiting-room, the dining-room, the baggage-room. He was on the point of going out to the taxi-stand and interrogating each driver in turn, when his eyes were caught by a smart suit-case that lay unattended on one of the seats. It bore the inscription "E.M.B.—Ky."

In his sudden relief he could have snatched it up and embraced it. But where was Eleanor? For five interminable minutes he stood guard over her property, watching every exit and entrance, and pacing the floor in his impatience. Suddenly an idea occurred to him, and, cursing himself for his stupidity, he strode over to the telephone-booths.

Eleanor was in the corner one, the receiver at her ear, evidently waiting for her call. As Quin flung upon the door she turned and faced him in defiant surprise.

"What are you doing here?" she demanded indignantly. "Did grandmother send you?"

"No; she does n't know I 'm here."

Eleanor turned nervously to the telephone.

"Hello! I can't understand you. Put—what? Oh! I forgot. Wait a minute——"

Letting the receiver swing, she fumbled in her

purse; then, finding no small change, looked appealingly at Quin.

He produced the necessary coin and handed it to her.

"I don't think I 'd put it in just yet," he said quietly.

For a moment she paused irresolute; then she dropped the coin in the slot.

"Is this the Hotel Kington?" she asked. "Will you please try again to get Mr. Phipps—Harold Phipps? P-h-i-p-p-s."

Quin watched her fingers drumming on the shelf, and he knew he ought to go out of the booth and close the door; but instead he stayed in and closed it.

"He does n't answer?" Eleanor was repeating over the telephone. "Will you please page the dining-room, and if he is not at breakfast send a bell-boy up to waken him? It 's *very* important."

Again there was a long wait, during which Eleanor did not so much as turn her head in Quin's direction. It was only when her answer came that she looked at him blankly.

"They say he is n't there. The chambermaid was cleaning the room, and said his bed had not been disturbed."

Then, seeing a humorously unsympathetic look flit across Quin's face, she burst out angrily:

"What right had you to follow me over here?"

They were standing very close in the narrow glass

enclosure, and as he looked down at the small, trembling figure with her back against the wall and her eyes full of frightened defiance, he felt uncomfortably like a hunter who has run down some young wild thing and holds it at bay.

"Please, Miss Nell," he implored, "don't think I 'm going to peach on you! Whatever you do, I 'll stand by you. Only I thought, perhaps, you might need a friend."

"I *have* a friend!" she retorted furiously. "If Harold Phipps had received my telegram last night, nothing in the world could have stopped him from meeting me—nothing!"

Then the defiance dropped from her eyes, leaving her small sensitive face quivering with hurt pride and an overwhelming doubt. She bit her lips and turned away to hide her tears.

Quin put a firm hand on her arm and piloted her back to her suit-case.

"What we both need is breakfast," he said. "Come to think of it, I have n't had a mouthful since yesterday noon."

"Neither have I; but I could n't swallow a bite. Besides, I 've got to find Harold."

"Well, you can't do anything till he gets back to the hotel. If you 'll come in with me while I get a cup of coffee, we can talk things over."

She followed him reluctantly into the dining-room, but refused to order anything. For some

time she sat with her chin on her clasped hands, watching the door; then she turned toward him accusingly.

"Did you see Rose's telegram?"

"No."

He watched her open her purse and take out a yellow slip, which she handed to him.

"Don't take the step planned. Imperative reasons forbid. Rose."

he read slowly; then he looked up. "Well?" he said.

"What does she mean?" burst forth Eleanor. "How dared she send me a message like that unless she knew something——"

She broke off abruptly and her eyes searched Quin's face. But he was apparently counting the grains of sugar that were going into his coffee, and refused to look up.

"If it had been grandmother or Aunt Isobel I should n't have been in the least surprised; they are just a bunch of prejudices and believe every idle story they hear. But Rose is different. She 's known about Harold and me for months. She forwarded his letters to me when I was in Baltimore. And now for her to turn against me like this——"

"Why don't you wait till you hear her side of it?" suggested Quin, still concerned with the sugar-bowl.

"How can I?" cried Eleanor, flinging out her hands. "I 've no place to go, and I 've no money.

If I had had money enough I 'd have gone straight to Papa Claude last night."

Quin's heart gained a beat. He made a hurried calculation of his financial resources in the vain hope that that might yet be the solution of the difficulty. Whatever was to be done must be done at once, for Harold Phipps might arrive at any moment, and Quin felt instinctively that his advent would decide the matter.

"I wish I had enough to send you," he said, "but all I 've got is my return ticket and enough to buy another one for you."

At the mere suggestion Eleanor's anger flared.

"I'll never go back to grandmother's! I 'll jump in the lake first!"

"What 's the matter with Valley Mead?"

"What good would that do? Grandmother would make Uncle Ranny send me straight home. No; I 've thought of all those things—it 's no use."

"You could go to the Martels'."

"Yes, and put another burden on Cass. I tell you, I 'm not going home. I am going to see Harold, and—and talk things over, and perhaps go straight on to New York to-night."

"You can't see him if he is out of town."

"Why do you think he is out of town?"

"Well, he is n't here," Quin observed dryly.

The next moment he was sorry he had said it, for the light died out of her face and she looked

so absurdly young and helpless that it was all he could do to refrain from gathering her up in his arms and carrying her home by force.

"See here, Miss Nell," he said earnestly, leaning across the table. "Would you be willing to go back to the Martels' if you knew that this time next month you 'd be in New York with money enough to carry you through the winter?"

"No. That is—whose money?"

"Your own. I 'll go to Queen Vic and put the whole thing up to her so she can't get around it."

Eleanor brushed the suggestion aside impatiently.

"Don't you suppose I 've exhausted every possible argument? And now, when she finds out what I 've done——"

"But you have n't done anything—yet."

"She would n't believe me if I told her that I had n't seen Harold. She never believes me."

"She 'd believe *me*," said Quin, "and what 's more she 'd listen to me."

Eleanor did not answer; she sat doggedly watching the swinging doors, through which a draggled throng came and went.

"He 'll be here soon," she said half-heartedly—"unless he 's gone off for a week-end somewhere. If he does n't come soon we can go up to the hotel and find out whether he left any address. Perhaps you could get me a room there until to-morrow."

Quin's courage was at its lowest ebb. It was like

trying to save a drowning person who fights desperately against being saved. He heard a stentorian voice through a megaphone announcing that the eight-thirty train for the southwest would leave in five minutes on track three, and he decided to stake his all on a last chance.

"That 's my train," he said, rising briskly. "Are you coming with me, or are you going to stay here?"

"I am going to stay. But you can't leave me like this! It 's pouring rain and I have n't any umbrella, and if I get to the hotel and he is n't there, what shall I do? Why don't you help me, Quin? Why don't you stay with me till he comes?"

"Sorry," said Quin, steeling his heart against those appealing eyes and praying for strength to be firm, "but I 've got to be ready to go back to work to-morrow morning. Is it good-by?"

He held out his hand, but she did not take it. Instead she clutched his sleeve.

"What would *you* do, Quin?" she asked. "Tell me honestly, not what you want me to do, or think I ought to do, but what would you do in my place?"

In spite of his pretended haste, he stopped to consider the matter.

"Well," he admitted frankly, "it would depend entirely on how much I trusted the fellow I 'd promised to marry."

"I *do* trust him, and I 'm going to marry him; but, you see, Rose's telegram, and his not being here,

and all, have made me so unhappy! I know he can explain everything when I see him, only I don't know what to do now. Do you think I ought to go back?"

"That 's for you to decide."

"But I tell you I can't decide. Somebody 's always made up my mind for me, and now to have to decide this big thing all in a minute——"

"All aboard for the Southwestern Limited!" came the voice through the megaphone.

Eleanor glanced instinctively at her suit-case, then up at Quin.

"Shall I take it?" he asked, with his heart in his throat; and then, when she did not say no, he seized it in one hand and her in the other.

"We 'd better run for it!" he said.

"But, Quin—wait a minute—I won't go to grandmother's! You 've got to protect me——"

"You leave it to me!" he said, as he thrust her almost roughly through the crowd and rushed her toward the gate.

CHAPTER 26

SO I am to understand that the young lady defies my authority and refuses point-blank to come home."

"That 's about what it comes to, I reckon."

It was evening of that eventful Sunday when Eleanor and Quin had returned from Chicago. He and Madam Bartlett sat facing each other in the sepulchral library, where the green reading-light cast its sickly light on Lincoln and his Cabinet, on Andrew Jackson dying in the bosom of his family, on Madam savagely gripping the lions' heads on the arms of her mahogany chair.

That her quarrel with Eleanor and the girl's subsequent flight had made the old lady suffer was evinced by the pinched look of her nostrils and the heavy, sagging lines about her mouth; but in her grim old eyes there was no sign of compromise.

"Very well!" she said. "Let her stay at her precious Martels'. She will stand just about one week of their shiftlessness. I shan't send her a stitch of clothes or a cent of money. Maybe I can starve some sense into her."

Quin traced the pattern in the table-cover with a

massive brass paper-knife. It was a delicate business, this he had committed himself to, and everything depended upon his keeping Madam's confidence.

"You never did try letting her have her head, did you?" He put the question as a disinterested observer.

"No. I don't intend to until she gets this fool stage business out of her mind."

"Well, of course you can hold that up for six months, but you can't stop it in the end."

"Yes, I can, too. I 'd like to know if I did n't keep Isobel from being a missionary, and Enid from marrying Francis Chester when he did n't make enough money to pay her carfare."

"That 's so," agreed Quin cheerfully. "And then, there was Mr. Ranny." He waited for the remark to sink in; then he went on lightly: "But say! They all belong to another generation. Things are run on different lines these days."

"More 's the pity! Every little fool of a kite thinks all it has to do is to break its string to be free."

"Miss Nell don't want to break the string; she just wants it lengthened."

Madam turned upon him fiercely.

"See here, young man. You think I don't know what you are up to; but, remember, I was n't born

yesterday. If Eleanor has sent you up here to talk this New York stuff——"

"She has n't; I came of my own accord."

"Well, you need n't think just because I 've shown you a few favors that you can meddle in family affairs. It 's not the first time you 've attended to other people's business."

Her fingers were working nervously and her eyes beginning to twitch. She made Quin think of Minerva when Mr. Bangs came into the office.

"I bet there 's one time you are glad I meddled," he said with easy good humor. "You might have been walking on a peg-stick, Queen Vic, if I had n't butted in. Do you have to use your crutches now?"

"Crutches! I should say not. I don't even use a cane. See here!"

She rose and, steadying herself, walked slowly and painfully to the door and back.

"Bully for you!" said Quin, helping her back into the chair. "Now what were we talking about?"

"You were trying to hold a brief for Eleanor."

"So I was. You see, I had an idea that if you 'd let me put the case up to you fair and square, maybe you 'd see it in a different light."

"Well, that 's where you were mistaken."

"How do you know? You have n't listened to me yet!"

Madam glared at him grimly.

"Go ahead," he said. "Get it out of your system."

"Well, it 's like this," Quin plunged into his subject. "Next July Miss Nell will be of age and have her own money to do as she likes with, won't she?"

"She won't have much," interpolated Madam. "Twenty thousand won't take her far."

"It will take her to New York and let her live pretty fine for two or three years. Everybody will cotton up to her and flatter her and make her think she 's a second Julia Marlowe, and meantime they 'll be helping her spend her money. Now, my plan is this. Why don't you give her just barely enough to live on, and let her try it out on the seamy side for the next six months? Nobody will know who she is or what 's coming to her, and maybe when she comes up against the real thing she won't be so keen about it."

Madam followed him closely, and for a moment it looked as if the common sense of his argument appealed to her. Then her face set like a vise.

"No!" she thundered her decision. "It would be nothing less than handing her over bodily to that pompous old biped Claude Martel! For the next six months she has got to stay right here, where I can know what she is doing and where she is!"

"Do you know where she was last night?" Quin played his last trump.

She shot a suspicious look at him from under her shaggy brows.

"You said she was at the Martels'."

"I did not. I said she was all right and you 'd hear from her to-day."

"Where was she?"

"She was on the way to Chicago to join Mr. Phipps."

He could not have aimed his blow more accurately. Its effect was so appalling that he feared the consequences. Her face blanched to an ashy white and her eyes were fixed with terror.

"She—she—has n't married him?" she cried hoarsely.

"No, no; not yet. But she may any time."

"Good Lord! Why have n't you told me this before? Call Isobel! No! she 's at church! Get Ranny! Somebody must go after the child!"

Quin laid a quieting hand on her arm, which was shaking as if with the palsy.

"Don't get excited," he urged. "Somebody did go after her last night, and brought her home."

"But where is she now? Where is that contemptible Phipps? I 'll have him arrested! Are you sure Nellie is safe?"

"I left her safe and sound at the Martels' half an hour ago. Will you listen while I tell you all about it?"

As quietly as he could he told the story, interrupted again and again by Madam's hysterical outbursts. When he had finished she struggled to her feet.

"The child is stark mad!" she cried. "I am going after her this instant."

"She won't see you," warned Quin.

"I 'll show you whether she sees me or not! I am going to bring her home with me to-night. She 's got to be protected against that scoundrel. Ring for the carriage!"

Quin did not move. "She said if any of you started after her you 'd find her gone when you got there."

"But who will tell her?"

"I will. I promised she would n't have to see you. It was the only way I could get her back from Chicago."

She scowled at him in silence, measuring his determination against her own.

"Very well," she said at last. "Since you are in such high favor, go and tell her that she can come home, and nothing more will be said about it. I suppose there 's nothing else to do under the circumstances. But I 'll teach her a lesson later!"

Quin balanced the paper-knife carefully on one finger.

"I don't think you quite understand," he said. "She is n't coming home. She still says she is going to marry Mr. Phipps. He will probably get her telegram when he goes to the hotel, and when she does n't turn up in Chicago he will take the first

train down here. That 's the way I 've figured it out."

"And do you think I am going to sit here, and do nothing while all this is taking place?"

"No; that 's what I been driving at all along. I want you and Miss Nell to come to some compromise before he gets here."

"What sort of compromise? Have n't I swallowed my pride and promised to say nothing if she comes back? Does she want me to get down on my knees and apologize?"

"No. That 's the trouble. She don't want you to do anything. All she is thinking about is getting married and going to New York."

"She can go to New York without that! That contemptible man! I knew all summer he was filling her head with romantic notions, but I never dreamed of this. Why, she 's nothing but a child! She does n't know what love is——" Then her voice broke in sudden panic. "We must stop it at any cost. Go—go promise her anything. Tell her I 'll send her to New York, to Europe, anywhere to get her out of that wretch's clutches. My poor child! My poor baby!"

Her grief was no less violent than her anger had been, and her tearless sobs almost shook her worn old frame to pieces.

Quin knew just how she felt. It had been like that with him last night when he heard the news.

With one stride he was beside her and had gathered her into his arms.

"There, there!" he said tenderly. "It 's going to be all right. We are going to find a way out."

This unexpected caress, probably the first one Madam had received in many years, reduced her to a state of unprecedented humility. She transferred her resentment from Eleanor to Harold Phipps, and announced herself ready to follow whatever course Quin suggested.

"I 'd offer her just this and nothing more," he advised: "The fare to New York, tuition at the dramatic school, and ten dollars a week."

"She can't live on that."

"Yes, she can. Rose Martel does."

Madam became truculent at once.

"Don't quote that girl to me. Eleanor 's been used to very different surroundings."

"That 's the point. Let her have what she has n't been used to. You have tried giving her a bunch of your money and telling her how to spend it. Try giving her a little of her own and letting her do as she likes with it."

"I don't care what she does for the present, if she just won't marry that man Phipps. Make her give you her word of honor not to have anything whatever to do with him for the next six months. By that time she will have forgotten all about him."

"I 'll do my best," said Quin, rising. "You 'll hear from me first thing in the morning."

"Well, go now! But ring first for Hannah. We must pack the child's things to-night. The main thing is to get her out of town before that hound can get here. Don't you thing either Ranny or Isobel had better take her on to New York to-morrow?"

Quin returned to the Martels' breathing easily for the first time in twenty-four hours. As he passed Rose's room on the way to his own, he saw a light over the transom, and heard the girls' voices rising in heated argument. He knew that the subject under discussion was Harold Phipps, and that Rose's arraignment was meeting with indignant denial and protest. But the fact that Rose could offer specific evidence that would shake the staunchest confidence gave him grim satisfaction.

He stumbled into his own small room, and lay across the bed looking up at the shadows made by the street lamp on the ceiling. Would Miss Nell believe what she heard? Would it go very hard with her? Would she give Phipps up? Would she accept Madam's offer? And, if she did, would she ever be willing to come home again?

Then his thoughts swerved away from all those perplexing questions and went racing back over the events of the day. For nine blissful hours he had had Eleanor all to himself. They had taken a day-

coach to avoid meeting any one she knew, and he had managed to secure a rear seat, out of the range of curious eyes. Here she had poured out all her troubles, allowing the accumulated bitterness of years to find vent in a torrent of unrestrained confidence.

She recalled the days of her unhappy childhood, when she had been fought over and litigated about and contended for, until the whole world seemed a place of hideous discord and petty jealousies. She pictured her circumscribed life at the Bartletts', shut in, watched over, smothered with care and affection, but never allowed an hour of freedom. She dwelt on the increasing tyranny of her grandmother, the objection to her friends, the ruthless handling of several prospective lovers. And she ended by telling him all about her affair with Harold Phipps, and declaring that nothing they could say or do would make her give him up! And then, quite worn out, she had fallen asleep and her head had drooped against his shoulder.

Quin could feel now the delicious weight of her limp body as she leaned against him. He had sat so still, in his fear of waking her, that his arm had been numb for an hour. Then, later on, when she did wake up, he had got her some cold water to bathe her face, and persuaded her to eat a sandwich and drink a glass of milk. After that she had felt much better, and even cheered up enough to

laugh at the way he looked in the queer cap the obliging stranger had given him.

"I could make her happy! I know I could make her happy!" he whispered passionately to the shadows on the ceiling. "She don't love me now; but maybe when she gets over this——"

His thoughts leaped to the future. He must be ready if the time ever came. He must forge ahead in the next six months, and be in a position by the time Eleanor had tried out her experiment to put his fate to the test. He must make up to old Bangs, and stop criticizing his methods and saying things that annoyed him. He must sacrifice everything now to the one great object of pleasing him. Pleasing him meant advancement; advancement meant success; success might mean Eleanor!

He got up restlessly and tiptoed to the door. The light over Rose's transom was gone and the house was silent.

CHAPTER 27

ELEANOR did not leave for New York the following day. Neither did she see Harold Phipps when he arrived on the morning train. His anxious inquiries over the telephone were met by Rose's cool assurance that Miss Bartlett was spending the week-end with her, and that she would write and explain her silly telegram. His demand for an immediate interview was parried with the excuse that Miss Bartlett was confined to her bed with a severe headache and could not see any one. Without saying so directly, Rose managed to convey the impression that Miss Bartlett was quite indifferent to his presence in the city and not at all sure that she would be able to see him at all.

This was an interpretation of the situation decidedly more liberal than the facts warranted. Even after Eleanor had been served with the unpalatable truth, generously garnished with unpleasant gossip, she still clung to her belief in Harold and the conviction that he would be able to explain everything when she saw him. Quin's report of Madam's offer to send her to New York was received in noncommittal silence. She would agree to nothing, she

declared, until she saw Harold, her only concession being that she would stay in bed until the afternoon and not see him before evening.

About noon a messenger-boy brought her a box of flowers and a bulky letter. The latter had evidently been written immediately after Harold's talk with Rose, and he made the fatal mistake of concluding, from her remarks, that Eleanor had changed her mind after sending the telegram and had not come to Chicago. He therefore gave free rein to his imagination, describing in burning rhetoric how he had received her message Saturday night just as he was retiring, how he tossed impatiently on his bed all night, and rose at dawn to be at the station when the train came in. He pictured vividly his ecstasy of expectation, his futile search, his bitter disappointment. He had dropped everything, he declared, to take the next train to Kentucky to find out what had changed her plans, and to persuade her to be married at once and return with him to Chicago. The epistle ended with a love rhapsody that deserved a better fate than to be torn into shreds and consigned to the waste-basket.

"Tell the boy not to wait!" was Eleanor's furious instruction. "Tell him there's no answer now or ever!"

Then she pitched the flowers after the note, locked

her door, and refused to admit any one for the rest of the day.

After that her one desire was to get away. She felt utterly humiliated, disillusioned, disgraced, and her sole hope for peace lay in the further humiliation of accepting Madam's offer and trying to go on with her work. But even here she met an obstacle. A letter arrived from Papa Claude, saying that he would not be able to get possession of the little apartment until December first, a delay that necessitated Eleanor's remaining with the Martels for another month.

The situation was a delicate and a difficult one. Eleanor was more than willing to forgo the luxuries to which she had been accustomed and was even willing to share Rose's untidy bedroom; but the knowledge that she was adding another weight to Cass's already heavy burden was intolerable to her. To make things worse, she was besieged with notes and visits and telephone calls from various emissaries sent out by her grandmother.

"I 'll go perfectly crazy if they don't leave me alone!" she declared one night to Quin. "They act as if studying for the stage were the wickedest thing in the world. Aunt Isobel was here all morning, harping on my immortal soul until I almost hoped I did n't have one. This afternoon Aunt Flo came and warned me against getting professional notions in my head, and talked about my

social position, and what a blow it would be to the family. Then, to cap the climax, Uncle Ranny had the nerve to telephone and urge me against taking any step that would break my grandmother's heart. Uncle Ranny! Can you beat that?"

"I 'd chuck the whole bunch for a while," was Quin's advice. "Why don't you let their standards go to gallagher and live up to your own?"

"That 's what I want to do, Quin," she said earnestly. "My standards are just as good as theirs, every bit. I 've got terrifically high ideals. Nobody knows how serious I feel about the whole thing. It is n't just a silly whim, as grandmother thinks; it 's the one thing in the world I care about —now."

Quin started to speak, reconsidered it, and whistled softly instead. He had formed a Spartan resolve to put aside his own claims for the present, and be in word and deed that "best friend" to whom he had urged Eleanor to come in time of trouble. With heroic self-control, he set himself to meet her problems, even going so far as to encourage her spirit of independence and to help her build air-castles that at present were her only refuge from despair.

"Just think of all the wonderful things I can do if I succeed," she said. "Papa Claude need never take another pupil, and Myrna can go to college, and Cass and Fan Loomis can get married."

"And don't forget Rose," suggested Quin, to keep up the interest. "You must do something handsome for her. She's a great girl, Rose is!"

Eleanor looked at him curiously, and the smallest of puckers appeared between her perfectly arched brows. Quin saw it at once, and decided that Rose's recent handling of Mr. Phipps had met with disfavor, and he sighed as he thought of the hold the older man still had on Eleanor.

During the next difficult weeks Quin devoted all his spare time to the grateful occupation of diverting the Martels' woe-begone little guest. Hardly a day passed that he did not suggest some excursion that would divert her without bringing her into contact with her own social world, from which she shrank with aversion. On Sundays and half-holidays he took her on long trolley rides to queer out-of-the-way places where she had never been before: to Zachary Taylor's grave, and George Rogers Clark's birthplace, to the venerable tree in Iroquois Park that bore the carved inscription, "D. Boone, 1735." One Sunday morning they went to Shawnee Park and rented a rowboat, in which they followed the windings of the Ohio River below the falls, and had innumerable adventures that kept them out until sundown.

Eleanor had never before had so much liberty. She came and went as she pleased; and if she missed a meal the explanation that she was out

with Quin was sufficient. Sometimes when the weather was good she would walk over to Central Park and meet him when he came home in the evening. They would sit under the bare trees and talk, or look over the books he had brought her from the library.

At first she had found his selections a tame substitute for her recent highly spiced literary diet; but before long she began to take a languid interest in them. They invariably had to do with outdoor things—stars and flowers, birds and beasts, and adventures in foreign lands.

"Here's a jim-dandy!" Quin would say enthusiastically. "It's all about bees. I can't pronounce the guy that wrote it, but, take it from me, he's got the dope all right."

It was in the long hours of the day, when Eleanor was in the house alone, that she faced her darkest problems. She had been burnt so badly in her recent affair that she wanted nothing more to do with fire; yet she was chilled and forlorn without it. With all her courage she tried to banish the unworthy image of Harold Phipps, but his melancholy eyes still exercised their old potent charm, and the memory of his low, insistent tones still echoed in her ears. She came to the tragic conclusion that she was the victim of a hopeless infatuation that would follow her to her grave.

So obsessed was she by the thought of her shat-

tered love affair that she failed to see that a troubled conscience was equally responsible for her restlessness. Her life-long training in acquiescence and obedience was at grips with her desire to live her own life in her own way. She had not realized until she made the break how much she cared for the family approval, how dependent she was on the family advice and assistance, how hideous it was to make people unhappy. Now that she was about to obtain her freedom, she was afraid of it. Suppose she did not make good? Suppose she had no talent, after all? Suppose Papa Claude was as visionary about her career as he was about everything else? At such times a word of discouragement would have broken her spirit and sent her back to bondage.

"Would you go on with it?" she asked Quin, time and again.

"Sure," said Quin stoutly; "you 'll never be satisfied until you try it out."

"But suppose I 'm a failure?"

"Well, then you 've got it out of your system, and won't have to go through life thinking about the big success you 'd have been if you 'd just had your chance."

She was not satisfied with his answer, but it had to suffice. While he never discouraged her, she felt that he shared the opinion of the family

that her ambition was a caprice to be indulged and got rid of, the sooner the better.

The first day of December brought word from Claude Martel that the apartment was ready. Eleanor left on twenty-four hours' notice, and it required the combined efforts of both families to get her off. She had refused up to the last to see her grandmother, but had yielded to united pressure and written a stiff good-by note in which she thanked her for advancing the money, and added—not without a touch of bitterness—that it would all be spent for the purpose intended.

Randolph Bartlett took her to the station in his car, and Miss Isobel met them there with a suit-case full of articles that she feared Eleanor had failed to provide.

"I put in some overshoes," she said, fluttering about like a distracted hen whose adopted duckling unexpectedly takes to water. "I also fixed up a medicine-case and a sewing basket. I knew you would never think of them. And, dear, I know how you hate heavy underwear, but pneumonia is so prevalent. You must promise me not to take cold if you can possibly avoid it."

Eleanor promised. Somehow, Aunt Isobel, with her anxious face and her reddened eyelids, had never seemed so pathetic before.

"I 'll write to you, auntie," she said reassuringly; "and you must n't worry."

"Don't write to me," whispered Miss Isobel tremulously. "Write to mother. Just a line now and then to let her know you think of her. She 's quite feeble, Nellie, and she talks about you from morning until night."

Eleanor's face hardened. She evidently did not enjoy imagining the nature of Madam's discourse. However, she squeezed Aunt Isobel's hand and said she would write.

Then Quin arrived with the ticket and the baggage-checks, the train was called, and Eleanor was duly embraced and wept over.

"We won't go through the gates," said Mr. Ranny, with consideration for Miss Isobel's tearful condition. "Quin will get you aboard all right. Good-by, kiddie!"

Eleanor stumbled after Quin with many a backward glance. Both Aunt Isobel and Uncle Ranny seemed to have acquired haloes of kindness and affection, and she felt like a selfish ingrate. She looked at the lunch-box in her hand, and thought of Rose rising at dawn to fix it before she went to work. She remembered the little gifts Cass and Myrna and Edwin had slipped in her bag. How good they had all been to her, and how she was going to miss them! Now that she was actually embarked on her great adventure, a terrible misgiving seized her.

"Train starts in two minutes, boss!" warned the

porter, as Quin helped Eleanor aboard and piloted her to her seat.

"You could n't hold it up for half an hour, could you?" asked Quin. Then, as he glanced down and met Eleanor's eyes brimming with all those recent tendernesses, his carefully practised stoicism received a frightful jolt.

As the "All aboard!" sounded, she clutched his sleeve in sudden panic.

"Oh, Quin, I know I 'm going to be horribly lonesome and homesick. I—I wish you were going too!"

"All right! I 'll go! Why not?"

"But you can't! I was fooling. You must get off this instant!"

"May I come on later? Say in the spring?"

"Yes, yes! But get off now! Quick, we are moving!"

She had almost to push him down the aisle and off the steps. Then, as the train gained speed, instead of looking forward to the wide fields of freedom stretching before her, she looked wistfully back to the disconsolate figure on the platform, and, with a sigh that was half for him and half for herself, she lifted her fingers to her lips and rashly blew him a good-by kiss.

CHAPTER 28

THAT aërial kiss proved more intoxicating to Quin than all the more tangible ones he had ever received. It sent him swaggering through the next few months with his head in the air and his heart on fire. Nothing could stop him now, he told himself boastfully. Old Bangs was showing him signal favor, Madam Bartlett was his staunch friend, Mr. Ranny and the aunties were his allies, and even if Miss Nell did n't care for him yet, she did n't care for anybody else, and when a girl like Miss Nell looks at a fellow the way she had looked at him——

At this rapturous point he invariably abandoned cold prose for poetry and burst into song.

Almost every week brought him a letter from Eleanor—not the romantic, carefully penned epistles she had indited to Harold Phipps, but hasty scrawls often dashed off with a pencil. In them she described her absurd attempts at housekeeping in the little two-room apartment; her absorbing experiences in the dramatic school; all the ups and downs of her wonderful new life. She was evidently enjoying her freedom, but Quin flattered

himself that between the lines he could find evidences of discouragement, of homesickness, and of the coming disillusionment on which he was counting to bring her home when her six months of study were over.

It was only when Rose read him Papa Claude's lengthy effusions that his heart misgave him. Papa Claude announced that Eleanor was sweeping everything before her at the dramatic school, where her beauty and talent were causing much comment, and that he had not been mistaken when he had foreseen her destiny, and, "single-handed against the world," forced its fulfilment.

Usually, upon reading one of Papa Claude's pyrotechnical efforts, Quin went to see Madam Bartlett. After all, he and the old lady were paddling in the same canoe, and their only chance of success was in pulling together.

As the end of the six months of probation approached, Madam became more and more anxious. Ever since Eleanor's high-handed departure she had been undergoing a metamorphosis. Like most autocrats, the only things of which she took notice were the ones that impeded her progress. When they proved sufficiently formidable to withstand annihilation, she awarded them the respect that was their due. Eleanor's childish whim, heretofore crushed under her disapprobation, now loomed as a terrifying possibility. The girl had proved her

mettle by living through the winter on a smaller allowance than Madam paid her cook. She had shown perseverance and pluck, and an amazing ability to get along without the aid of the family. In a few months she would be of age, and with the small legacy left her by her spendthrift father, would be in a position to snap her fingers in the face of authority.

"If it were n't for that fool Phipps I 'd have her home in twenty-four hours," Madam declared to Quin. "She 'll be wanting to take a professional engagement next."

Quin tried to reassure her, but his words rang hollow. He too was growing anxious as the months passed and Eleanor showed no sign of returning. He longed to throw his influence with Madam's in trying to induce her to come back before it was too late. The only thing that deterred him was his sense of fair play to Eleanor.

"You let Miss Nell work it out for herself," he advised; "don't threaten her or persuade her or bribe her. Leave her alone. She 's got more common sense than you think. I bet she 'll get enough of it by May."

"Well, if she does n't, I 'm through with her, and you can tell her so. I meant to make Eleanor a rich woman, but, mark my word, if she goes on the stage I 'll rewrite my will and cut her off without a penny. I 'll even entail what I leave Isobel

and Enid. I 'll make her sorry for what she 's done!"

But with the approach of spring it was Madam who was sorry and not Eleanor. Quin's sympathies were roused every time he saw the old lady. Her affection and anxiety fought constantly against her pride and bitterness. For hours at a time she would talk to him about Eleanor, hungrily snatching at every crumb of news, and yet refusing to pen a line of conciliation.

"If she can do without me, I can do without her," she would say stubbornly.

Quin's business brought him to the Bartlett home oftener than usual these days. For twenty years Madam and Mr. Bangs, as partners in the firm of Bartlett & Bangs, had tried to run in opposite directions on the same track, with the result that head-on collisions were of frequent occurrence. Since Randolph Bartlett's retirement from the firm, Quin had succeeded him as official switchman, and had proven himself an adept. His skill in handling the old lady was soon apparent to Mr. Bangs, who lost no time in utilizing it.

One afternoon in April, when Quin was busily employed at his desk, his eyes happened to fall upon a calendar, the current date of which was circled in red ink. The effect of the discovery was immediate. His energetic mood promptly gave way to one of

extreme languor, and his gaze wandered from the papers in his hand across the grimy roof tops.

This time last year he and Miss Nell had made their first pilgrimage to Valley Mead. It was just such a day as this, warm and lazy, with big white clouds loafing off there in the west. He wondered if the peach trees were in bloom now, and whether the white violets were coming up along the creek-bank. How happy and contented Miss Nell always seemed in the country! She had never known before what the outdoor life was like. How he would like to take her hunting for big game up in the Maine woods, or camping out in the Canadian Rockies with old Cherokee Jo for a guide! Or better still,—here his fancy bolted completely,—if he could only slip with her aboard a transport and make a thirty days' voyage through the South Seas!

It was at this transcendent stage of his reveries that a steely voice at his elbow observed:

"You seem to be finding a great deal to interest you in that smokestack, young man!"

Quin descended from his height with brisk embarrassment.

"Anything you wanted, sir?" he asked.

Mr. Bangs looked about cautiously to make sure that nobody was in ear-shot, then he said abruptly:

"I want you to come out to my place with me for overnight. I want to talk with you."

Quin's amazement at this request was so pro-

found that for a moment he did not answer. Surmises as to the nature of the business ranged from summary dismissal to acceptance into the firm. Never in his experience at the factory had any employee been recognized unofficially by Mr. Bangs. To all appearances, he lived in a large limousine which deposited him at the office at exactly eight-thirty and collected him again on the stroke of four. Rumor hinted, however, that he owned a place in the suburbs, and that the establishment was one that did not invite publicity.

"Very well, sir," said Quin. "What time shall I be ready?"

"We will start at once," said Mr. Bangs, leading the way to the door.

On the drive out, Quin's efforts at conversation met with small encouragement. Mr. Bangs responded only when he felt like it, and did not scruple to leave an observation, or even a question, permanently suspended in an embarrassing silence. Quin soon found it much more interesting to commune with himself. It was exciting to conjecture what was about to happen, and what effect it would have on his love affair. If he got a raise, would he be justified in putting his fate to the test? All spring he had fought the temptation of going to New York in the hope that by waiting he would have more to offer. If by any miracle of grace Miss Nell should yield him the slightest foothold, he must be prepared

to storm the citadel and take possession at once.

The abrupt turn of the automobile into a somber avenue of locusts recalled him to the present, and he looked about him curiously. Mr. Bangs had not been satisfied to build his habitation far from town; he had taken the added precaution to place it a mile back from the road. It was a somewhat pretentious modern house, half hidden by a high hedge. The window-shades were drawn, the doors were closed. The only signs of life about the place were a porch chair, still rocking as if from recent occupation, and a thin blue scarf that had evidently been dropped in sudden flight.

Mr. Bangs let himself in with a latch-key, and led the way into a big dreary room that was evidently meant for a library. A handsome suite of regulation mahogany furniture did its best to justify the room's claim to its title, but rows of empty bookshelves yawned derision at the pretense.

Mr. Bangs lit the electrolier, and, motioning Quin to a chair, sat down heavily. Now that he had achieved a guest, he seemed at a loss to know what to do with him.

"Do you play chess?" he asked abruptly.

"I can play 'most anything," Quin boasted. "Poker's my specialty."

For an hour they bent over the chess-board, and Quin was conscious of those piercing black eyes studying him and grimly approving when he made

a good play. For the first time, he began to rather like Mr. Bangs, and to experience a thrill of satisfaction in winning his good opinion.

Only once was the game interrupted. The colored chauffeur who had driven them out came to the door and asked:

"Shall I lay the table for two or three, sir?"

Mr. Bangs lifted his head long enough to give him one annihilating glance.

"I have but one guest," he said significantly. "Set the table for two."

The dinner was one of the best Quin had ever tasted, and his frank enjoyment of it, and franker comment, seemed further to ingratiate him with Mr. Bangs, who waxed almost agreeable in discussing the various viands.

After dinner they returned to the library and lit their cigars, and Quin waited hopefully.

This time he was not to be disappointed.

"Graham," said Mr. Bangs, "what salary are you drawing?"

"One hundred and fifty, sir."

"How long have you been at the factory?"

"A year last February."

"Not so long as I thought. You are satisfied, I take it?"

Quin saw his chance and seized it.

"It 's all right until I can get something better."

Mr. Bangs relit his cigar, and took his time about

it. Then he blew out the match and threw it on the floor.

"I am looking for a new traffic manager," he said.

"What 's the matter with Mr. Shields?" Quin inquired in amazement.

"I have fired him. He talks too much. I want a man to manage traffic, not to superintend a Sunday-school."

"But Mr. Shields has been there for years!"

"That 's the trouble. I want a younger man—one who is abreast of the times, familiar with modern methods."

Quin's heart leaped within him. Could Mr. Bangs be intimating that he, Quinby Graham, with one year and four months' experience, might step over the heads of all of those older and more experienced aspirants into the empty shoes of the former traffic manager?

The South Seas seemed to flow just around the corner.

"I have been considering the matter," continued Mr. Bangs, catching a white moth between his thumb and forefinger and taking apparent pleasure in its annihilation, "and I 've decided not to get a new man in for the summer, but to let you take the work for the present and see what you can do with it."

Quin's joy was so swift and sudden that even

the formidable banks of Mr. Bangs's presence could not keep it from overflowing.

"I can handle it as easy as falling off a log!" he cried excitedly. "I know every State in the Union and then some. Of course, I hate to see old Shields go, but he *is* a slow-coach. I 'll put it all over him! You 'll see if I don't!"

"I am not so sure about that," said Mr. Bangs. "Shields had the sense to do what he was told without arguing the matter."

Quin laughed joyously. "Right you are!" he agreed. "I 'd have come out of the service with a couple of bars on my shoulders if I had n't argued so much. I don't know what gets into me, but when I see a better way of running things I just have to say so."

"Well, I don't want you to say so to me," warned Mr. Bangs. "There are certain business methods that we 've got to observe, whether we like them or not. Take the matter of listing freight, for instance. That 's where Shields fell down. He knows perfectly well that there is n't a successful firm in the country that does n't classify its stuff under the head that calls for the lowest freight rates."

"How do you mean?"

Mr. Bangs proceeded to explain, concluding his remarks with the observation that you could n't afford to be too particular in these matters.

"But it is beating the railroads, isn't it?"

"The railroads can afford it. They lose no chance to gouge the manufacturers. It 's like taxes. The government knows that everybody is going to dodge them, and so it allows for it. Nobody is deceived, and nobody is the worse for it. Human nature is what it is, and you can't change it."

"Does the traffic manager have to classify the exports?" Quin asked.

"Certainly; that and routing the cars is his principal business. It 's a difficult and responsible position in many ways, and I have my doubts about your being able to fill it."

"I can fill it all right," said Quin, as confidently as before, but with a certain loss of enthusiasm. Upon the shining brows of his great opportunity he had spied the incipient horns of a dilemma.

For the next two hours Mr. Bangs explained in detail the duties of the new position, going into each phase of the matter with such efficient thoroughness that Quin forgot his scruples in his absorbed interest in the recital. It was no wonder, he said to himself, that Mr. Bangs was one of the most successful manufacturers in the South. A man who was not only an executive and administrator, but who could make with his own hands the most complicated farming implement in his factory, was one to command respect. Even if he did not like him personally, it was a great thing to work under him, to have his approval, to be trusted by him.

When Quin went up to his room at eleven o'clock, his head was whirling with statistics and other newly acquired facts, which he spent an hour recording in his note-book.

It was not until he went to bed and lay staring into the darkness that the mental tumult subsided and the moral tumult began. The questions that he had resolutely kept in abeyance all evening began to dance in impish insistence before him. What right had he to take Shields's place, when he had said exactly the things that Shields had been fired for saying? Did he want to go the way Shields had gone, compromising with his conscience in order to keep his job, ashamed to face his fellow man, cringing, remorseful, unhappy?

Then Mr. Bangs's arguments came back to him, specious, practical, convincing. Business was like politics; you could keep out if you didn't like it, but if you went in you must play the game as others played it or lose out. Five hundred a month! Why, a fellow wouldn't be ashamed to ask even a rich girl to marry him on that! The thought was balm to his pride.

As he lay there thinking, he was conscious of a disturbing sound in the adjoining room, and he lifted his head to listen. It sounded like some one crying—not a violent outburst, but the hopeless, steady sobbing of despair. His thoughts flew back to that blue scarf on the porch, to the inquiry about

an extra seat at the table. They were true, then, those rumors about the lonely, unhappy woman whom Mr. Bangs had kept a virtual prisoner for years. Quin wondered if she was young, if she was pretty. A fierce sympathy for her seized him as he listened to her sobs on the other side of the wall. What a beast a man was to put a woman in a position like that!

His wrath, thus kindled, threw Mr. Bangs's other characteristics into startling relief. He saw him at the head of his firm, hated and despised by every employee. He saw him deceiving Madam Bartlett, sneering at Mr. Ranny's efforts at reform, terrorizing little Miss Leaks. Then he had a swift and relentless vision of himself in his new position, a well trained automaton, expected to execute Mr. Bangs's orders not only in the factory but in the Bartlett household as well.

He tossed restlessly on his pillow. If only that woman would stop crying, perhaps he could get a better line on the thing! But she did not stop, and somehow while she cried he could see nothing good in Bangs or what he stood for. Hour after hour his ambition and his love fought against his principles, and dawn found him still awake, staring at the ceiling.

Going back to town after an early breakfast, he said to Mr. Bangs:

"I 've been thinking it over, sir, and if you don't mind I think I 'll keep the position I 've got."

"What do you mean?" demanded Mr. Bangs. "You decline the promotion?"

"I am afraid I am not the man for the job," said Quin.

"That 's for me to decide."

Quin was visibly embarrassed. After his enthusiasm of the night before, his present attitude called for an explanation.

"Well, you see," he said awkwardly, "it may be good business and all that, but there are some things a fellow can't do when he feels about them the way I do."

"Meaning, I suppose, that your standards are so much higher than those of the rest of us that you cannot trade in the market-place?"

"No, sir; I don't mean anything of the kind," Quin flashed back, hot at the accusations of self-righteousness, but unable to defend himself without criticizing his employer.

"And this is final? You 've definitely decided?"

"I have."

"Very well; I am through with you." And Mr. Bangs unfolded his newspaper and read it the rest of the way to the city.

At the office door he was dismounting from the car with his silence still unbroken, when Quin asked nervously:

"Shall I go on with my old job, sir?"

Mr. Bangs wheeled upon him, his eyes like fiery gimlets.

"No!" he thundered. "You need n't go on with anything! For six months I have wasted time trying to teach you something about business. I 've pushed you along faster than your ability warranted. I 've given you a chance to quadruple your salary. And what is the result? You give me a lot of hot air about your conscience. Why don't you get a soap-box and preach on the street-corners? You can draw your money and go. There is no room on my pay-roll for angels!"

And, with a contemptuous shrug, he passed into the factory, leaving Quin standing dazed and appalled on the sidewalk.

CHAPTER 29

AS long as a man can see his goal shining, however faint and distant, he will steer his craft with tolerable reason and patience; but let the beacon-light be extinguished, and he promptly abandons reason and rashly trusts to instinct to guide him.

Quin, who had resolutely kept his course as long as he had been sure of his steady progress toward success, lost his head completely at this sudden collapse of his hopes, and took the first train for New York. A sudden mad necessity was upon him to see Eleanor at once. One look of encouragement, one word of hope from her, and he would rush back to port and gladly begin the voyage all over again.

He arrived at the Eighty-second Street apartment about six o'clock in the evening, and, after studying the dingy name-plates, took the five flights of stairs with uncommendable speed, and presented himself at the rear door on the sixth floor.

As he waited for an answer to his ring, he wondered if he had not made a mistake about the name on the door-plate. The narrow dark hall, permeated with a smell of onions and cabbage, was all too fa-

miliar to him, but it was not at all the proper setting for Eleanor. His bewilderment increased when the door was opened by a white-aproned figure, who after a moment of blank amazement seized his hand in both of hers and pressed it rapturously.

At least, that was what Quin imagined took place; but when, a moment later, he sat opposite a composed young lady who had removed her impulse with her apron, he knew that he must have been mistaken. She was still his adored Miss Nell, but with a difference that carried her leagues away from him. He knew how to cope with the hot-headed, rebellious Miss Nell; with the teasing, indifferent, provocative Miss Nell; and even with the disconsolate little Miss Nell who had wept against his shoulder coming home from Chicago. But in the presence of this beautiful, grown-up, self-contained young lady he felt thoroughly awkward and ill at ease. Had it not been for the warmth of her smile and the eagerness with which she plied him with questions, his courage would have failed him utterly.

"Now tell me all about everything!" she urged. "You are the first human being I 've seen from home for four mortal months. How 's everybody at grandmother's? Has Aunt Enid come home? How are Rose and the children?"

"One at a time!" protested Quin. "Tell me first about yourself. What sort of a place is this you are living in?"

"You must n't criticize our suite!" she said gaily. "This is a combination bedroom, dining-room, and kitchen. I am the cook and housemaid, and Papa Claude is the butler. You ought to see the way I 've learned to cook on the chafing-dish!"

Quin was not in the least interested in her culinary accomplishments. It offended his sense of the proprieties to see his divinity reduced to such necessities, and he did not at all approve of her surroundings.

"When are you coming home?" he asked abruptly.

Eleanor's eyes dropped.

"That depends. I may be here all summer. I 've had an engagement offered me."

Quin's hands grew cold. "You don't mean that you 're going to act for *pay?*"

"Of course. Why not? That 's what I 've been working for."

"But I thought when you tried it out that you would change your mind—that you would n't like it as much as you thought you would."

"But I *do*. I adore it! Nothing on earth can ever make me give it up!"

Quin's heart sank. "But I thought you 'd had enough," he said. "I thought you were homesick and lonesome."

"Who would n't have been? Look at the way

they have treated me at home? Do you know, none of them ever write to me any more?"

Quin tried not to look guilty, but the fact that he had counseled this course of discipline weighed upon him.

"Have n't I written enough for the family?" he asked.

But she was not to be put off.

"They treat me as if I had done something disgraceful!" she said indignantly. "My allowance is just half what it used to be, and yet I have to pay all my own expenses. As for clothes, I never was so shabby in my life. But I can stand that. It 's grandmother's silence that I resent. How can she pretend to care for me when she ignores my letters and treats me with perfect indifference?"

Hurt pride quivered through the anger in her voice, and she looked at Quin appealingly. Stung by his silence, she burst out afresh:

"Does n't she ever ask about me? Has she let me go for good and all?"

"Was n't that what you wanted?"

"You *know* it was n't! I did everything to get her consent. I 'd—I 'd give anything now if she would look at things differently. Do you think, when she finds out that I am actually on the stage, that she will ever forgive me—that she will ever want me to come home again?"

That was the moment when Quin should have

delivered Madam's ultimatum; but, before he had the chance, a key was turned in the lock, and the next instant Claude Martel's effulgent presence filled the room.

For a moment he stood poised lightly, consciously, his cane and gloves in one hand, and his soft felt hat turned gracefully across the other. On his ankles were immaculate white spats, and in his buttonhole blossomed the inevitable rose.

"Quinby Graham!" he cried in accents of rapture. "My Cassius's beloved Quin! *My* beloved Quin! What happy fortune blew you hither? But no matter. You are here—you are ours. Eleanor and I are going out to a studio party at a dear, dear friend's. You shall accompany us!"

"Oh, no, Papa Claude," protested Eleanor. "Quin does n't want to go to Miss Linton's messy old party. Neither do I. You go and leave us here. There are a million things I want to ask him."

But Papa Claude would not consider it. "You can ask them to-morrow," he said. "To-night I claim you both. We will introduce Quinby as one of the gallant heroes of the Great War. I shall tell his story—no—he shall tell it! Come, put on your hat, Eleanor; we must start at once."

"But here! Hold on!" protested Quin, laughing and freeing himself from Papa Claude's encircling arm, "I 'm not fixed to go to a party, and I have n't

got any story to tell. I 'll clear out and come back to-morrow."

"No, no!" protested Eleanor and Papa Claude in a breath, and after a brief struggle for supremacy the latter triumphantly continued:

"I promise you shall say nothing, if you prefer it. Modesty is gallantry's crowning grace. But you *must* accompany us. My heart is set upon it. Eleanor darling, here 's your wrap. Come, Quinby, my boy!" And the dynamic little gentleman hooked an arm through each of theirs and, in spite of their protests, bore them triumphantly down the stairs and off to the party.

It was not until they had boarded a crowded downtown car and found themselves wedged in the aisle that Quin and Eleanor managed to have another word alone.

"It 's a shame we had to come!" she pouted, looking up at him from under a tilted hat-brim that supported three dangling cherries.

"Where are we going?" he asked, thrilled by the discovery that her lips and the cherries matched.

"To a studio party down in Washington Square. Papa Claude is trying to get Estelle Linton to play the lead in 'Phantom Love.' You always meet all sorts of freaks at her parties."

"I did n't come to New York to meet freaks."

"What did you come for?"

"Shall I tell you?"

"Of course—why not?"

"You want to know? Right now?"

He was looking at her with an expression that was never intended to be worn in a public conveyance, and the thin-faced Polish woman on whose toes they were all but standing looked at them with such lively comprehension that Eleanor felt called upon to assume her most haughty and dignified manner for the rest of the way.

Miss Linton's party was in full swing when they arrived. It was an extremely hilarious party, the interest centering about a fat man in a dress-suit, with a bath towel around his waist, who was attempting to distil a forbidden elixir from an ingenious condenser of his own invention.

The studio, under a grimy skylight, was cluttered with bric-à-brac, animate and inanimate. A Daibutsu in a gilded shrine dominated one corner, and a handsome woman in a Manchu coat and swinging ear-rings of jade held court in another. At sight of the Martel group she laid down the small silver pipe she was smoking, and swam toward them through a cloud of incense and tobacco smoke.

"Dear old C. M.! Bless his heart!" she cried, kissing Papa Cloude effusively. Then she nodded good-naturedly to Eleanor, and held out a welcoming hand to Quin.

"Who is this nice boy?" she asked, her languid black eyes sweeping his face.

"Allow me to present ex-Sergeant Quinby Graham," said Papa Claude impressively—"a soldier of whom his friends and his country have every reason to be proud."

Then, to Quin's utter chagrin, he was conscious of the fact that Papa Claude was giving, in an audible aside, an account of his prowess that placed him second only to another sergeant whom the world acclaimed its chief hero.

"For the Lord's sake, head him off!" he whispered in an agony of embarrassment to Eleanor. "I did n't do half those things he 's telling about, and besides——"

But it was too late to interfere. Papa Claude, the center of one animated group after another, was kissing his way through the crowd, whispering the news as he went—that the guest of the evening was no other than the distinguished young Graham whom they all doubtless remembered, etc.

Within fifteen minutes Quin found himself the lion of the evening. Even the fat man and his improvised still were eclipsed by the counter-attraction. His very earnestness in disclaiming the honors thrust upon him added enormously to his popularity. The more clumsy and awkward he was, and the more furiously he blushed and protested, the more attention he received.

"So naïf!" "So perfectly natural!" "Nothing

but a boy, and yet think what he has done!" were phrases heard on every side.

Papa Claude corralled him in the corner with the Daibutsu and pompously presented each guest in turn. Quin felt smothered by the incense and the flattery. His collar grew tight, perspiration beaded his brow, and he began to cough.

"Effects of mustard-gas," Papa Claude explained in a stage whisper.

For seeming hours the agony endured, until the advent of refreshments caused a momentary diversion, and he made a hasty bolt for Eleanor and freedom.

He found her sitting on the divan, looking rather bored by the attentions of a stout elderly person with small porcine eyes and a drooping black mustache. Without troubling to apologize, Quin interrupted the conversation to say abruptly:

"Miss Nell, I am going."

Eleanor started to rise, but the red-faced one lifted a protesting voice.

"See here, young man," he blustered. "You can't run off with this little girl just when I 've got my first chance at her this evening. She 's going to stay right here and let me make love to her—is n't she?"

He turned a confident eye upon Eleanor, and even ventured to lay a plump detaining finger on her cool, slim wrist.

Eleanor rose instantly.

"I thought you were never coming!" she said impatiently over the stout man's head, "I 've been ready to go for an hour!"

CHAPTER 30

DOWN in the open square, under the clear cool stars, they looked at each other and laughed.

"Lead me to a bus!" cried Quin. "I want to ride on top of it where the wind can blow through my whiskers. My head feels like a joss-house!"

"Oh, but you were funny!" cried Eleanor. "I wish you could have seen your face when all those women swarmed around you. I was afraid you were going to jump out of the window! Did you ever feel anything so hot and stuffy as that room? And were n't they all silly and make-believe?"

Quin gave a mighty sigh of relief at being out of it.

"Is this the sort of thing you get let in for often?" he inquired, aghast.

"Oftener than I like. You see, all those people are Papa Claude's old friends, and he 's been having a lovely time showing me off as he showed you off to-night."

"But you surely don't *like* it?"

"Of course I don't. And they know it. They are already calling me a prig, and poking fun at me for not smoking and for not liking to have my

hands patted and my cheeks pinched. Is n't it funny, Quin? At home I was always miserable because there were too many barriers; I wanted to tear them all down. Here, where there are n't any, I find myself building them up at every turn, and getting furious when people climb over them."

"Bartlett *versus* Martel, eh?"

"I suppose so. Heaven knows, I wish I were one thing or the other."

"Oh, I don't know," said Quin. "You are pretty nice just as you are." Then he added inconsequently: "Who was that fat man you were talking to when I came up?"

"Mr. Pfingst. He is Estelle Linton's backer."

"Backer?" queried Quin. Then, when he saw Eleanor's eyes drop, he added vaguely: "Oh! I see!"

For the next block, strange to say, he did not think so much about Eleanor as he did about Miss Isobel Bartlett. The whole situation kept presenting itself through her austere eyes, and instinctively he put a protecting hand on Eleanor's elbow.

When at last they were on top of the bus, with the big, noisy city apparently going in the opposite direction, they promptly forgot all about the studio party and plunged headlong into their own important affairs.

"Begin at the *very* beginning," commanded Eleanor, settling herself for a good long ride; "I want you to tell me everything."

The beginning and the end and all that lay between them could easily have been compassed in three words by Quin. But there were things he had pledged himself to tell her before he even broached the subject that was shrieking for utterance. With painstaking exactness he set forth the facts that led up to his dismissal, trying to be fair to Mr. Bangs as well as to himself, and, above all, to claim no credit for taking the stand he had.

But Eleanor would not see it thus. With characteristic fervor she espoused his cause. She declared he had been treated outrageously. He ought to have taken the matter straight to her grandmother. The very idea! After all the work he had done at the factory, for him to be dismissed just because he would n't do a thing that he considered dishonorable! She *hated* Mr. Bangs—she always had hated him; and the more she dwelt upon the fact, the more ardently she approved Quin's course.

"It was perfectly splendid of you to refuse his offer!" she cried, and her eyes blazed with that particular ray of feminine partizanship that is most soothing to the injured masculine. "And you won't lose by it in the long run. You 'll get another position right off. Why don't you try to get one here in New York?"

"Would you like me to?"

"I should say I should! Then we could do all sorts of jolly things together. Not studio parties

or cabarets, but jolly outdoor things like we used to do at home. Do stay, Quin; won't you?"

She was looking up at him with such frank urgency and such entire sympathy that Quin lost his head completely.

"Miss Nell," he blurted out, "if I stay and get a job and make good, will you marry me?"

Eleanor, who was used to much more subtle manœuvers, was caught unaware by this sudden attack. For a second she was thrown into confusion; then she rallied all her forces for the defense.

"Why, of course I won't!" she said—then added with more conviction: "I am not going to marry *anybody*—not for years and years."

"But I 'll wait years and years," persisted Quin eagerly. "I would n't marry any girl until I could take care of her. But if you'll just give me a tip that maybe some day perhaps——"

It was very difficult to go on addressing his remarks to an impassive classic profile—so difficult, in fact, that he abandoned the effort and let his eyes say the rest for him.

Eleanor stirred uneasily.

"I *wish* you would n't be foolish, Quin, and spoil all our fun. I 've told you I mean to go on the stage for good and all. You know you would n't want an actress for a wife."

"I 'd want you, whatever you were," he said with

such fervor that she rashly gave him her luminous eyes again in gratitude.

He made the most of the opportunity thus offered.

"Honest, now!" he boldly challenged her. "You can't deny that you love me just a little bit, can you?"

She stared straight ahead of her down the long dim avenue, making no response to his question. The cherries that swung from her hat-brim stirred not a hair's-breadth, but the commotion their stillness caused in Quin's heart was nothing short of cyclonic.

"More than when you left Kentucky?" he persisted relentlessly.

This time a barely perceptible nod stirred the cherries.

"There!" he said triumphantly. "I knew it! Just keep right on the way you are going, and I won't say a word!"

"But I have n't given you any encouragement; you must n't think I have."

"I know it. But you have n't turned me down."

At this she smiled at him helplessly.

"You are not very easy to turn down, Quin."

"No," he admitted; "it can't be done."

At this moment the bus rounded a sharp corner without slowing up, and the passengers on top were lurched forward with such violence that at least

one masculine arm took advantage of the occasion to clasp a swaying lady with unnecessary solicitude. It may have been a second, and it may have been longer, that Quin sat with his arm about Eleanor and his hand clasping hers. Time and space ceased to exist for him and blessed infinity set in. And then——

"Good gracious!" she cried, starting up. "Where are we? I 'd forgotten all about our cross-street."

As a matter of fact they were in Harlem.

All the way back Eleanor refused to be serious about anything. The mischievous, contradictory, incalculable little devil that always lurked in her took full possession. She teased Quin, and laughed at him, leading him on one minute and running to cover the next.

When they reached the apartment, she tripped up the five flights as lightly as a bird, and Quin, in his effort to keep up with her, overtaxed himself and paid the penalty. Heart and lungs were behaving outrageously when he reached the top landing, and he had to steady himself by the banister.

"Oh, Quin, I ought to have remembered!" Eleanor cried, with what he considered divine compassion. "I can't bear to hear you cough like that! It sounds as if it were tearing you to pieces."

"It 's nothing!" said Quin, struggling to get his breath. "I 'll be all right in a minute. What 's the box by the door?"

Eleanor's glance followed his.

"If that old walrus, Pfingst, has dared to send me flowers again!" she cried, pouncing on the card and holding it so they both could read it.

Penciled in small, even lines were the words:

Sorry to find the lady-bird flown. Will call up in the morning. H. P.

Even in the dimly lighted hall, Quin could see the flush that suffused Eleanor's face.

"It 's Harold Phipps," she said, trying to be casual. "I—I did n't know he was in town."

Quin followed her into the apartment, and stood dully by the table as she untied the box and lifted half a dozen exquisite white orchids from their bed of maidenhair ferns. Then, trying very hard to keep his voice steady, he asked gently:

"What does this mean, Miss Nell? I thought you were n't going to have anything more to do with that man."

"Well, I have n't. That is, not—not until he came on last month to see about the play."

"What play?"

"'Phantom Love.'"

"But why did you have to see him?"

"Because I am to be in the play."

"Not in *his* play?"

"No more his than Papa Claude's."

Quin's face darkened.

"I saw him for only a few minutes," Eleanor went on, "and Papa Claude was with us. I give you my word, Quin, I've never spoken to him alone, or answered one of his letters."

"Then he has been writing to you? What business has he got worrying you with letters and flowers when you have told him you are through with him?"

In spite of his effort to keep calm, there was a rising note of anger in his voice.

"He is not worrying me," said Eleanor, evidently conscious of her weakness in admitting Harold at the window of friendship when she had banished him from the door of love. "He understands perfectly that everything is over between us. But it would be silly for us to refuse to speak to each other when we shall necessarily be thrown together a lot."

"Thrown together? How do you mean?"

"At rehearsals."

"Do you mean he is to be here in New York?"

"Yes—after next month. He has given up his position in Chicago, so he can devote all the time to the play. You see, he not only helped to write it, but he is financing it."

"So he is the—backer?" Quin was scarcely responsible for what he said, so suddenly had disaster trodden on the heels of ecstasy.

"He is Papa Claude's partner and producer," said

Eleanor with dignity. "If I don't care anything for him, I don't see what harm there is in seeing him."

"Not liking whisky won't keep it from going to your head," said Quin stubbornly.

"That's perfect nonsense; and besides, what can I do? It's his play as well as ours. I can't ask him to stay away from rehearsals."

"No; but you can stay away yourself. You don't have to be in this play. Something else will turn up. You can afford to wait."

"But that's just the point—I can't! And, besides, think how silly and childish it would be for me to refuse a wonderful chance for a professional début that might not come again in years."

"But don't you see, Miss Nell, you are in honor bound not to go on with this?"

"Honor bound? How do you mean?"

"Why, to Queen Vic."

"I agreed to break my engagement with Harold Phipps and not to answer any of his letters. I've kept my promise."

"Yes; but I thought, and I made her think, that you agreed not to see him or have anything to do with him for six months."

"Well, the time will be up in six weeks."

"Lots can happen in six weeks."

If Quin had been wise he would have taken another tack; but, in his earnest effort to make her

see her duty to Madam, he failed to press his own more personal claims, and thus lost his one chance of reaching her.

Eleanor understood impulse, emotion, but she would not listen to reason. The mere mention of Madam's name stirred up a whirlwind that snuffed out any love-lights that might have been kindling. She stood with her back to the table, twisting Harold Phipps's card in her fingers, and she looked at Quin suspiciously.

"Did grandmother send you up here to see if I was keeping my word?"

"She did not. She does n't know I am here."

"Then it 's just *you* who don't trust me?"

"Well, I don't think you are playing quite fair," admitted Quin bluntly, "either to Queen Vic or to me."

"And I suppose you propose to go back and tell her so?"

"I propose nothing of the kind. It 's up to you whether we both keep our word, or whether we both break it. You know what I think, and you see the position I am in."

"I can settle that," said Eleanor with spirit. "I can write home to-night and tell them what I intend to do. That will exonerate you, if that is what you are after."

"It *is n't* what I am after, and you know it! For God's sake, Miss Nell, be fair! You know you

can't go on with this thing without starting up the old trouble with Mr. Phipps."

"But, I tell you, I *can*. I can control the situation perfectly. Why can't you trust me, Quin?"

"I don't trust *him*. He 's got ways of compromising a girl that you don't know anything about. If he ever gets wind of your going to Chicago——"

"I wish you would n't throw that up to me!" There was real anger in her voice, which up to now had shown signs of softening. "Just because I happened to me a fool once, it does n't follow that I 'll be one again! It won't be pleasant for me, but I am not going to let his connection with 'Phantom Love' spoil my chance of a lifetime."

"And he will be at all the rehearsals, I suppose, and up here in the apartment between-times." Quin's jealousy ran through him like fire through dry stubble. "You 'll probably be seeing him every day."

"And what if I do?" demanded Eleanor. "I have told you our relations are strictly professional."

"That card looks like it," said Quin bitterly.

Eleanor tossed the object referred to in the trash-basket and looked at him defiantly. The very weakness of her position made her peculiarly sensitive to criticism, and the fact that her mentor was her one-time slave augmented her wrath.

"See here, Miss Nell." Quin came a step closer,

and his voice was husky with emotion. "I know how keen you are about the stage; but, take it from me, you are making a wrong start. If you'll just promise to wait until your time is up——"

"I won't promise anything! What's the use? Nobody believes me. Even you are siding with grandmother and suspecting me of breaking my word. I don't intend to submit to it any longer!"

Queer, spasmodic movements were going on in Quin's lungs, and he controlled his voice with difficulty.

"You mean you are going on seeing Mr. Phipps and letting him send you flowers and things?"

"I am *not!*" Eleanor cried furiously. "But, if I should, it's nobody's business but my own!"

For an agonizing moment they faced each other angrily, both of them lost in the labyrinth of their own situation. At the slightest plea for help on her part, Quin would have broken through his own difficulties and rushed to her rescue. He would even have offered to plead her cause again at the family tribunal. But she was like a wilful child who is determined to walk alone on a high and dangerous wall. The very effort to protect her might prove disastrous.

"If that's the case," said Quin, with his jaw thrust out and his nostrils quivering, "what do you want me to do?"

"I don't care what you do!" Eleanor flung back—"just so you leave me alone."

Without a word, he picked up his hat and strode out of the apartment and down the stairs. At every landing he paused, hoping against hope that she might call him back. Even at the door he paused, straining his ears for the faintest whisper from above. But no sound broke the stillness, and with a gesture of despair he flung open the door and passed out into the darkness.

CHAPTER 31

WHEN an extremely energetic person has spent eighteen months making connections with a family, he does not find it easy to sever them in a day. Quin's announcement that he was going to leave the Martels met with a storm of protest. He had the excellent excuse that when Cass married in June there would be no room for him, but it took all his diplomacy to effect the change without giving offense. Rose was tearful, and Cass furious, and a cloud of gloom enveloped the little brown house.

With the Bartletts it was no easier. On his return from New York he had found three notes from them, each of which requested an immediate interview. Madam's stated that she had heard of his dismissal from the factory and that she was ready to do battle for him to the death. "Geoffrey Bangs got rid of Ranny," she wrote, "and now he thinks he can ship you. But I guess I'll show him who is the head of the firm."

The second note was from Miss Isobel and was marked "Confidential." In incoherent sentences it told of a letter just received from Eleanor, in which

she announced that she was planning to make her professional début in July, and that as Mr. Phipps was connected with the play in which she was to appear, she felt that she could accept no further favors from her grandmother. Miss Isobel implored Quin to come at once and advise her what to do about telling Madam, especially as they were leaving for Maine within the next ten days.

The third delicately penned epistle was a gentle effusion from Miss Enid, who was home on a visit and eager to see "dear Quin, who had been the innocent means of reuniting her and the dearest man in all the world."

It was these letters that put Quin's desire for flight into instant action. He must go where he would not be questioned or asked for advice. The mere mention of Eleanor's name was agony to him. It contracted his throat and sent the blood pounding through his veins. His hurt was so intolerable that he shrank from even a touch of sympathy. Perhaps later on he would be able to face the situation, but just now his one desire was to get away from everything connected with his unhappiness.

In beating about in his mind for a temporary refuge, he remembered a downtown rooming-house to which he had once gone with Dirks, the foreman at Bartlett & Bangs. Here he transferred his few possessions, and persuaded Rose to tell the Bartletts that he had left town for an indefinite stay.

This he hoped would account for his absence until they left for their summer vacation.

The ten weeks that followed are not pleasant ones to dwell upon. The picture of Quin tramping the streets by day in a half-hearted search for work, and tramping them again at night when he could not sleep, of him lying face downward on a cot in a small damp room, with all his confidence and bravado gone, and only his racking cough for company, are better left unchronicled.

He fought his despair with dogged determination, but his love for Eleanor had twined itself around everything that was worth while in him. In plucking it out he uprooted his ambition, his carefully acquired friendships, his belief in himself, his faith in the future. For eighteen months he had lived in the radiance of one all-absorbing dream, with a faith in its ultimate fulfilment that transcended every fear. And now that that hope was dead, the blackness of despair settled upon him.

That fact that Eleanor had broken faith with him, that she was willing to renew her friendship with Harold Phipps when she knew what he was, that she was willing to give up friends and family and her inheritance for the sake of being with him, could have but one explanation.

Quin used to tell himself this again and again, as he lay in the hot darkness with his hands clasped across his eyes. He used it as a whip with which

to scourge any vagrant hopes that dared creep into his heart. Had n't Miss Nell told him that she did n't care what he said or did, just so he left her alone? Had n't she let him come away without expressing a regret for the past or a hope for the future?

But, even as his head condemned her, his heart rushed to her defense. After all, she had never said she cared for him. And why should she care for a fellow like him, with no education, or money, or position? Even with her faults, she was too good for the best man living. But she cared for Harold Phipps—and with that bitter thought the turmoil began all over again.

He was not only unhappy, but intolerably lonely and ill. He missed Rose and her care for him; he missed Cass's friendship; he missed his visits to the Bartletts; and above all he missed his work. His interest still clung to Bartlett & Bangs, and the only times of forgetfulness that he had were when he and Dirks were discussing the business of the firm.

What made matters worse was the humid heat of the summer. A low barometer, always an affliction to him, in his present nervous state was torture. Night after night he lay gasping for breath, and in the morning he rose gaunt and pale, with hollow rings under his eyes. Having little desire for food,

he often made one meal a day suffice, substituting coffee for more solid food.

This method of living could have but one result. By the middle of July he was confined to his bed with a heavy bronchial cold and a temperature that boded ill. Once down and defenseless, he became a prey to all the feminine solicitude of the rooming-house. The old lady next door pottered in and out, putting mustard plasters on his chest and forgetting to take them off, and feeding him nauseous concoctions that she brewed over a coal-oil stove. A woman from upstairs insisted on keeping his window and door wide open, and trying cold compresses on his throat. While the majorful mother of six across the hall came in each night to sweep the other two out, close the window and door, and fill the room with eucalyptus fumes.

Quin let them do whatever they wanted. The mere business of breathing seemed to be about all he could attend to these days. The only point on which he was firm was his refusal to notify his friends or to have a doctor.

"I 'll be all right when this beastly weather lets up," he said to Dirks one Sunday night. "Is there any sign of clearing?"

"Not much. It 's thick and muggy and still raining in torrents. I wish you 'd see a doctor."

Pride kept Quin from revealing the fact that he

had no money to pay a doctor. Five weeks without work had completely exhausted his exchequer.

"I 'm used to these knockouts," he wheezed with assumed cheerfulness one Sunday night. "It's not half as bad as it sounds. I 'll be up in a day or so."

Dirks was not satisfied. His glance swept the small disordered room, and came back to the flushed face on the pillow.

"Don't you want some grub?" he suggested. "I 'll get you anything you like."

"No, thanks; I 'm not hungry. You might put the water-pitcher over here by the bed. My tongue feels like a shredded-wheat biscuit."

Dirks gave him some water, then turned to go.

"Oh, by the way," he said. "Here 's a letter for you that 's been laying around at the factory for a couple of days. Nobody knew where to forward it."

Like a shot Quin was up in bed and holding out an eager hand. But at sight of the small cramped writing he lay back on his pillow listlessly.

"It 's from Miss Isobel Bartlett," he said indifferently. "Wonder what she's doing back in town in the middle of the summer."

"I hear they are all back," Dirks said. "The old lady is very ill and they had to bring her home. If you want anything in the night, just pound on the wall. I 'm going to fetch a doctor if you ain't better in the morning."

When Dirks had gone Quin opened his letter and read:

Dear Quin:

I am rushing this off to the factory in the hope that they have your address and can get into communication with you at once. Mother has had two dreadful attacks with her appendix, and the doctors say she cannot survive another. But she refuses point-blank to be operated on, and my brother and sister and I are powerless to move her. Won't you come the moment you get this, and try to persuade her? She has such confidence in your judgment, and you could always do more with her than any one else. I am almost wild with anxiety and I don't know which way to turn. Do come at once.

Your friend,
ISOBEL BARTLETT.

Quin sprang out of bed, and then sat down limply, waiting for the furniture to stop revolving about him. It was evident that he would have to use his head to save his legs, if he expected to make any progress. Holding to the bed-post, he brought all his concentration to bear on the whereabouts of the various garments he had thrown off ten days before. The lack of a clean shirt and the imperative need of a shave presented grave difficulties, but he would have gone to Miss Isobel's rescue if he had had to go in pajamas!

When at last he had struggled into his clothes, he put out his light and tiptoed past Dirks' door. At the first sniff of night air he began to cough, and he clapped his hand over his mouth, swearing softly to himself. On the front steps he hesitated.

The rain was falling in sheets, and the street lights shone through a blur of fog. For the first time, Quin realized it was a block to the car line, and that he had no umbrella. Hard experience had taught him the dire results of exposure and over-exertion. But the excitement of once more getting in touch with the Bartletts, of being of service to Madam, and above all of hearing news of Eleanor, banished all other considerations. Turning up his coat collar and pulling his hat over his eyes, he went down the steps and started on an uncertain run for the corner.

CHAPTER 32

DURING the days that Quin was floundering in the bog of poverty, illness and despair, Eleanor Bartlett was triumphantly climbing the peak of achievement. "Phantom Love," after weeks of strenuous rehearsal and nerve-racking uncertainty, had had its première performance at Atlantic City and scored an instantaneous hit.

All spring Eleanor had lived in excited anticipation of the event. In the hard work demanded of her she had found welcome relief from some of her own complicated problems. She wanted to forget that she had broken her word, that she was causing the family serious trouble, and more than all she wanted to forget Quinby Graham and the look on his face when he left her.

During her stay in New York she had suffered many disillusions. She had seen her dreams translated into actual and disconcerting realities. But, in spite of the fact that much of the gold and glamour had turned to tinsel, she was still fascinated by the life and its glorious possibilities.

It was not until she got into the full swing of the rehearsals that she made a disconcerting discovery.

Try as she would, she could not adapt herself to the other members of the company. She hated their petty jealousies and intermittent intimacies, the little intrigues and the undercurrent of gossip that made up their days. From the first she realized that she was looked upon as an alien. The fact that she was shown special favors was hotly resented, and her refusal to rehearse daily the love passages with Finnegan, the promising young comedian who two years before had driven an ice-wagon in New Orleans, was a constant grievance to the stage manager. In the last matter Harold Phipps had upheld her, as he had in all others; but his very championship constituted her chief cause of worry.

Since the day of his joining the company she had given him no opportunity for seeing her alone. By a method of protection peculiarly her own, she had managed to achieve an isolation as complete as an alpine blossom in the heart of an iceberg. But in the heat and enthusiasm of a successful try-out, when everybody was effervescing with excitement, it was increasingly difficult to maintain this air of cold detachment.

Papa Claude alone was sufficient to warm any atmosphere. He radiated happiness. Every afternoon, arrayed in white flannels and a soft white hat, with a white rose in his buttonhole, he rode in his

chair on the boardwalk, bowing to right and to left with the air of a sovereign graciously acknowledging his subjects. Night found him in the proscenium-box at the theater, beaming upon the audience, except when he turned vociferously to applaud Eleanor's exits and entrances.

The entire week of the first performance was nothing short of pandemonium. Mr. Pfingst had brought a large party down from New York on his yacht, and between rehearsals and performances there was an endless round of suppers and dinners and sailing-parties.

With the arrival of Sunday morning Eleanor was in a state of physical and emotional exhaustion. She was sitting before her dressing-table in a sleeveless pink négligée, with her hair dangling in two thick childish braids over her shoulder, when Papa Claude dashed in from the next room to announce that Mr. Pfingst had invited the entire cast to have lunch on his yacht.

"Not for me!" said Eleanor, sipping her coffee between yawns. "I am going straight back to bed and sleep all day."

"Morning megrims!" cried Papa Claude, fresher than the proverbial daisy. "What you need is a frolic with old Neptune! We bathe at eleven, go aboard the *Minta* at twelve, lunch at one. Pfingst's chef is an artist; he can create a lobster Newburg

that is an epic!" Papa Claude's tongue made the circle of his lips as he spoke.

"I don't like lobster," Eleanor pouted; "and, what's more, I don't like Mr. Pfingst."

"Nonsense, my love! Pfingst is a prince of good fellows. Very generous—very generous indeed. Besides, there will be others on board—Harold and Estelle and myself."

Eleanor laid her face against his sleeve.

"I wish you and I could run off somewhere for the day alone. I am so sick of seeing those same people day in and day out. They never talk about anything but themselves."

Papa Claude stroked her hair and smiled tolerantly. It was natural that his little Eleanor should be capricious and variable and addicted to moods. She was evidently acquiring temperament.

Some one tapped at the door, and he sprang to answer it.

"I've just been to your room, and the maid said you were in here," said Harold Phipps's voice.

"Come right in!" cried Papa Claude, flinging wide the door. "We are just discussing plans, and need you to cast the deciding vote."

"But I'm not dressed, Papa Claude!" expostulated Eleanor. "I still have on my kimono."

"A charming costume," said Papa Claude—"one in which a whole nation appears in public. I leave

it to my distinguished collaborator: could any toilet, however elaborate, be more becoming?"

Harold gave a light laugh as his glance rested with undisguised approval on the slender figure in its clinging silk garment, the rosy hues of which were reflected in the girl's flaming cheeks.

"Just stopped for a second, C. M.," Harold said, avoiding her indignant eyes. "I wanted to tell you about the New York press notices. They are simply superb! *Tribune* has a column. The *Times* and *Herald* give us a headliner. And even the old *Sun* says there are passages in 'Phantom Love' that might have been written by Molière!"

"Where are the papers?" cried Papa Claude, prancing with excitement.

"I gave mine to Estelle. You can get them downstairs at the news-stand."

"I 'll run down now—be back in a second." And Papa Claude rushed impetuously from the room.

Eleanor and Harold stood facing each other where he had left them, he with an air of apologetic amusement, and she with an angry dignity that rested incongruously on her childish prettiness.

"Will you please go down and tell Mr. Pfingst that I am not coming to his party?" she asked, with the obvious intention of getting rid of him.

"Why are n't you?"

"Because I don't like him."

"Neither do it. But what has that to do with it? Estelle Linton will take him off our hands."

"I don't care for Miss Linton, either. If I had known——"

"Oh, come! Haven't we got past that?" scoffed Harold, sitting astride a chair and looking at her quizzically. "Nobody pays any attention to Estelle's numerous little affairs. I'd as soon think of criticizing a Watteau lady on an ivory fan!"

"You can probably catch Mr. Pfingst in the dining-room if you go down at once," suggested Eleanor pointedly.

"But I've no intention of going down at once. Eleanor, why do you play with me like this? Can't you see that this can't go on? I've been patient, God knows. For two months I've done nothing but advance your interests, put you forward in every conceivable way. And what have I got? The merest civility! Do you suppose it's pleasant for me to know that everybody in the company is whispering about my infatuation for you and your indifference to me? The maddening part of it is that I know perfectly well you are *not* indifferent. You are in love with me. You always have been. You'd have married me last fall if some busybody hadn't filled your ears with scandal. Confess, wouldn't you?"

"Yes; but——"

"I knew it! And you are going to marry me

now. You can do anything you want, have anything you want. I 'll put you at the head of your own company; I 'll take you over to London. I 'll do anything under heaven but give you up."

He rose suddenly and went toward her, catching her bare arm and trying to draw her toward him; but she struggled from his embrace.

"Let me go!" she cried furiously. "If you don't leave the room instantly, I will! There 's Papa Claude now. Let me pass!"

It was not Papa Claude, however, to whom she opened the door. It was Estelle Linton, smartly attired for the day's expedition, and exhibiting all the compensating charms with which she sought to atone for her lack of brains and morals. With a glance of sophisticated comprehension she took in the disordered room, the perturbed young people, the unfinished breakfast-tray; then she burst into a gay little laugh.

"Ten thousand pardons!" she cried, backing away from the door in assumed confusion. "I should n't have called so early. I just ran in to bring you *Town Topics*. The most killing article about you, dear. By-by; I 'll see you later!" And, kissing her hand to Eleanor, she flitted down the hall.

"Shall I go or will you?" Eleanor demanded of Harold.

She was standing in the open door, all the color

fled from her face and her eyes blazing with anger.

"I 'll go, of course," said Harold. "Only, you must not mind Estelle. Everybody know's she 's a fool——"

The door was slammed in his face and locked before he finished the sentence.

For a moment Eleanor stood immovable; then her eye fell on the paper that Estelle Linton had thrust into her hand, and she saw her stage name on the title-page.

Pretty little romance back of the production of "Phantom Love" [she read]. It is rumored that a wealthy young Chicago playwright, having met with family opposition in winning a young Southern belle, took advantage of her histrionic ambition, and persuaded her to play a rôle in his new play, which he wrote especially for her. Those who saw the opening performance of "Phantom Love" at Atlantic City Wednesday night will have little trouble in recognizing the heroine of the story. Miss Nell Martel is one of the daintiest bits of femininity that have flitted behind the footlights in many moons. She has youth and beauty and a certain elusive charm. But the fact remains that she can not act. For the continued success of the really brilliant play, let us hope that the young lady's lover may soon become her husband, and that, having won his prize, he will substitute a professional for the charming young amateur who is in no way up to the rest of the really excellent cast.

Eleanor crushed the paper in her hand, flung herself across the bed, and buried her hot face in the pillow. All her life she had walked unafraid and inviolate, protected by her social position, the over-zealous solicitude of the family, and her own purity. She had flown out of the family nest, con-

fident of her power to take care of herself, to breast any storm. And here, at the beginning of her flight, she found herself in utter confusion of body and spirit, powerless to protect herself against such conduct as Harold's, such printed gossip as lay before her, or such unspeakable insinuations as Estelle Linton's.

When Papa Claude returned, her first impulse was to pour out her troubles to him; but second thought restrained her. He was too much a part of that casual, irresponsible world to take anything it did or said seriously. She called through the door to him that she had gone to bed and was going to stay there.

But she did not stay there. She got up and knelt by the open window, looking across the seething mass of humanity on the boardwalk below to the calm stretches of blue sea beyond. For the first time, she faced her problem fairly and squarely. Up to now she had been trying to compromise, to be broad and tolerant and cosmopolitan. But she had to admit that the new life satisfied her no more than the old had. One was too circumscribed, the other too free. If it was true that she had no talent and was simply tolerated in the company because of Harold Phipps, she must know it at once. To be drawing a salary that she did not earn, and accepting favors for which a definite reward would be expected, was utterly intolerable to her.

A wild desire seized her to go back to New York and seek another engagement. In spite of what that odious article said, she believed that she could succeed on the stage. Papa Claude believed in her; the Kendall School people were enthusiastic about her work; they would help her to make another start.

But did she honestly want to make another start? A conscience that had overslept itself began to stir and waken. After all, what did the plaudits of hundreds of unknown people count for, when the approval and affection of those nearest and dearest was withdrawn? What would any success count for against the disgust she felt for herself.

A wave of terrific homesickness swept over her. But what was it she wanted, she asked herself, in place of this gay kaleidoscope of light and color and ceaseless confusion? Not the stagnation of the Bartlett household, certainly not the slipshod poverty of the Martels. She searched her heart for the answer.

And as she knelt there with her head on the window-sill, looking miserably out to sea, a strange thing happened to her. In a moment of swift, sure vision she saw Quinby Graham's homely, whimsical face, she felt his strong arms around her, and into her soul came a deep, still feeling of unutterable content.

"I am coming, Quin!" she whispered, with a little catch in her voice.

Then it was that Destiny played her second trump for Quin. It was in the form of a telegram that a bell-boy brought up from the office, and it announced that Madam Bartlett was not expected to live through the day.

Within twenty-four hours Eleanor was in Kentucky.

"Is she living?" she demanded of Hannah, who answered her ring at her grandmother's door.

"I don't know, honey," whispered Hannah, ashy with fright. "They 's operatin' now. We thought she was going to die all day yesterday, but she never give in to be operated on till Mr. Quin come."

"Where are Aunt Isobel and Aunt Enid?"

"They 's all in the library. Mr. Ranny 's there, too. Ain't nobody upstairs with her but jest the doctors an' the nurse an' Mr. Quin."

Eleanor crept upstairs and sat down on the top step, outside that door before which she had halted in dread so many times before. Remorse and sympathy and acute apprehension struggled for mastery. All the old antagonism for her grandmother was swept away in the dread prospect of losing her. It was impossible to think of the family existing without her. She held it up, kept it together, maintained the proud old Bartlett tradition.

There was a sound behind the closed doors.

Eleanor strained her ears to listen. It was someone coughing, at first gently, then violently. The next moment the door opened and a wild-eyed, unshaven figure staggered into the hall.

"Damn that ether!" some one muttered.

And then, before Eleanor could get to her feet, Quinby Graham came unsteadily toward her, stumbled twice, then pitched forward on his face, striking his head on the banister as he fell.

CHAPTER 33

TWO weeks later, when Quin struggled back to consciousness, he labored under the delusion that he was still in the army and back in the camp hospital. Eleanor, who scarcely left his bedside, was once more Miss Bartlett, the ward visitor, and he was Patient Number 7. He tried to explain to all those dim figures moving about the darkened room that he was making her a bead chain, and unless they got him more beads he could not finish it in time. When they reassured him and tried to get him to take food, he invariably wanted to know if Miss Bartlett had brought it, and which was her day to come again. Then the doctor and the nurse would argue with him, and try to make him remember things he was sure had never happened, and his mental distress would become acute. At such times somebody, who of course could not be Miss Bartlett, but who had her voice and eyes, would take his hand and tell him to go to sleep, then the tangles would all come straight.

One day he was startled out of a stupor by the sound of a querulous old voice saying:

"I guess if he could get out of bed to come

across the city to me, I can come across the hall to him. Wheel me closer!"

Quin was drifting off again, when a hand gripped his wrist.

"Open your eyes, boy! Look at me. Do you know who this is?"

He lifted his heavy lids, and wondered dully what Madam was doing at the camp hospital.

"Put the blinds up," she commanded to some one back of her. "Let him see the wall-paper, the furniture. Move that fool screen away."

For the first time, Quin brought his confused attention to bear on his surroundings, and even glanced at the space over the mantel to see if a certain picture was at its old place.

"You are in my house," said Madam, with a finality that was not to be disputed. "Do you remember the first time you came here?"

He shook his head.

"Yes, you do. I fell down the steps and broke my leg, and you came in off the street to tie me up with an umbrella and the best table napkins. What are you smiling about?"

"Smelling salts," Quin murmured, as if to himself.

"You don't need any smelling salts!" cried Madam, missing his allusion. "All you need is to rouse yourself and put your mind on what I am saying. Do you remember living in this house?"

He could not truthfully say that he did, though familiar objects and sounds seemed to be all around him.

"Well, I'll make you," said Madam, nothing daunted. "You stayed in this very room for three months to keep the burglars from stealing Isobel and Enid, and every night you walked me up and down the hall on my crutches."

She paused and looked at him expectantly; but things were still a blur to him.

"You surely remember the Easter party?" she persisted. "If you can forget the way your shirt kept popping open that night, and the way your jaw swelled up, it's more than I can!"

Quin winced. Even concussion of the brain had failed to deaden the memory of that awful night.

"I sort of remember," he admitted.

"Good! That will do for to-day. As for the rest, I'll tell you what happened. You came here one night two weeks ago, when everybody had me dead and buried, and you deviled me into having an operation that saved my life. You stood right by me while they did it. Then you collapsed and knocked your head on the banister, and, as if that wasn't enough, developed pneumonia on top of it. Now all you've got to think about is getting well."

"But—but—Miss Eleanor?" Quin queried weakly, fearing that the blessed presence that had hovered over him was but a figment of his dreams.

"She came home to help bury me," said Madam. "Failing to get the job, she took to nursing you. Now stop talking and go to sleep. If I hear any more of this stuff and nonsense about your being in a hospital and making bead chains, I 'll forbid Eleanor crossing the threshold; do you hear?"

From that time on Quin's convalescence was rapid—almost too rapid, in fact, for his peace of mind. Never in his life had he been so watched over and so tenderly cared for. Mr. Ranny kept him supplied with fresh eggs and cream from Valley Mead; Mr. Chester and Miss Enid deluged him with magazines and flowers; Miss Isobel gave him his medicine and fixed his tray herself; Madam chaperoned his thoughts and allowed no intruding fancies or vagaries.

But all these attentions were as nothing to him, compared with the miracle of Eleanor's presence. Just why she was remaining at home he dared not ask, for fear he should be told the date of her departure. The fact that she flitted in and out of his room, flirting with the doctor, teasing the aunties, assuming a divine proprietorship over him, was heaven enough in itself.

Sometimes, when they were alone and she thought he was asleep he would see the dancing, restless light die out of her eyes, and a beautiful exalted look come into them as if she were listening to the music of the spheres.

He attributed this to the fact that she was happy in being once more reconciled to the family. Even she and Madam seemed to be on terms of the closest intimacy, and he spent hours in trying to understand what had effected the change.

As he grew stronger and was allowed to sit up in bed, he realized, with a shock, what a fool's paradise he was living in. A few more days and he must go back to that dark, damp room in Chestnut Street. He must find work—and work, however menial, for which he had the strength. Eleanor would return to New York, and he would probably never see her again. During his illness she had been heavenly kind to him, but that was no reason for thinking she had changed her mind. She had given him his final answer there in New York, and he was grimly determined never to open the subject again.

But one day, when they were alone together, his resolution sustained a compound fracture. Eleanor was reading aloud to him, and in the midst of a sentence she put down the book and looked at him queerly.

"Quin," she said, "did you know I am not going back?"

"Why not? Did the play fail?"

"No. It 's a big success. Papa Claude will probably make a small fortune out of it."

"But you? What 's the trouble?"

"I 've had enough. I had made up my mind to leave the company even before I was sent for."

Quin's eyes searched her face, but for once he held his tongue.

She was evidently finding it hard to continue. She twisted the fringe of the counterpane in her slender, white fingers, and she did not look at him.

"It all turned out as you said it would," she admitted at last. "I—I simply could n't stand Harold Phipps."

Quin's heart performed an athletic feat. It leaped into his throat and remained there.

"But you 'll be joining some other company, I suppose?" He tried to make his voice formal and detached.

"That depends," she said; and she looked at him again in that queer, tremulous, mysterious way that he did not in the least understand.

Her small hands were fluttering so close to his that he could have captured them both in one big palm; but he heroically refrained. He kept saying over and over to himself that it was just Miss Nell's way of being good to a fellow, and that, whatever happened, he must not make her unhappy and sorry—he must not lose his head.

"Quin,"—her voice dropped so low he could scarcely hear it,—"have you ever forgiven me for the way I behaved in New York?"

"Sure!"

He was trembling now, and he wondered how much longer he could hold out.

"Do you—do you—still feel about me the way you—you did—that night on the bus?" she whispered.

Quin looked at her as a Christian martyr might have looked at his persecutor.

"I think about you the way I 've always thought about you," he said hopelessly—"the way I shall go on thinking about you as long as I live."

"Well," said Eleanor, with a sigh of relief, "I guess that settles it"; and, to his unspeakable amazement, she laid her head on his pillow and her cheek on his.

When he recovered from his shock of subliminal ecstasy, his first thought was of the trouble he was storing up for Eleanor. Even his rapture was dimmed by the prospect of involving her in another love affair that could only meet with bitter opposition of her family.

"We must keep it dark for the present," he urged, holding her close as if he feared she would slip away. "Maybe, when I am well, and have a good position, and all, they won't take it so hard."

Eleanor refused to listen to any such counsel. She wanted to announce their engagement at once, and be married at the earliest possible date. He needed her to take care of him, she declared; and besides, they could make a start on the money that

would soon be due her from her father's estate. To this proposition Quin would not listen, and they had a spirited quarrel and reached no agreement.

Eleanor had fallen seriously in love for the first time in her life, and it was a sudden and overwhelming experience. During those anxious days of Quin's illness, when his life had hung in the balance, she had time to realize what he meant to her. Now that he needed skilful nursing and constant care to assure his recovery, she was determined not to be separated from him.

In spite of his protests, she joyfully announced their engagement to Uncle Ranny and the aunties at dinner, and was surprised to find that the family tree, instead of being rocked to its foundation, was merely pleasantly stirred in its branches.

"You see, we could not help suspecting it," Miss Isobel twittered excitedly to Quin, when she brought him his tray. "You talked about her incessantly in your delirium, and the dear child was almost beside herself the night we thought you might not recover. I told sister then that if you got well——"

"But what about Madam?" Quin interrupted anxiously. "What will she think of Miss Nell's being engaged to a fellow like me, with no money or position, or any prospects of being able to marry for God knows how long?"

Miss Isobel looked grave. "Nellie is breaking the news to her now," she said primly. "I am

afraid she is going to find it very hard. But, as sister says, there are times when one has to follow one's own judgments. When mother sees that we all stand together about this——"

She waved her hand with a little air of finality. It was the second time in her life that she had made even a gesture toward freedom.

The interview between Eleanor and her grandmother lasted for more than an hour, and nobody knew the outcome of it until the next morning, when a family council was called in Quin's room. Madam was wheeled in in state, resplendent in purple and gold, with her hair elaborately dressed, as usual.

To everybody's amazement, she opened the conference by abruptly announcing that she had decided that Eleanor and Quin should be married at once.

"She 's at loose ends, and he 's at loose ends. The sooner they get tied up, the better," was the way she put it.

"But hold on!" cried Quin, sitting up in bed. "I can't do that, you know; I 've got to get on my feet first."

"How are you going to get on your feet until you get your strength back?" demanded Madam. "You look like going to work, don't you?"

"Well, the doctor has promised me I can go out on Saturday. I ought to be able to go to work in a couple of weeks."

"Couple of fiddle-sticks! Dr. Rawlins told me it would be two months before you would be fit for work, and even then you would have to be careful."

"Well, you don't think I am going to let Miss Nell in on a deal like that, do you?" Quin's voice broke and he gripped Eleanor's hand until she winced.

"But, Quin, I want it to be now," Eleanor begged. "Grandmother and I have gone over it from every standpoint, and she 's come to see it as I do. You need me, and I need you. Why can't you be sensible and see it as we do?"

How Quin ever withstood those pleading tones and beseeching eyes, it is impossible to say. But withstand them he did, announcing stubbornly that it was bad enough for a girl to marry a chap with broken bellows; but for her to marry one she would not only have to nurse, but support as well, was not to be thought of. There was but one thing to do, and that was to wait.

Then it was that Madam, who had been reasonably patient up till now, lost her temper and delivered an ultimatum.

"You 'll marry her now or not at all," she thundered. "I am sick and tired of the way you try to run this family, Quinby Graham! For more than a year now you have carried things with a high hand. You got Ranny out of the factory and

on a farm. You married Enid to Francis Chester, and sent them to California. You made me let Eleanor go to New York, and came very near landing her on the stage for good. And now, when I have been persuaded into letting the child marry you, you are not satisfied, but insist on doing it at your own time and in your own way!"

"You forgot one thing, granny," suggested Eleanor demurely. "He made you have the operation."

Madam was not to be diverted. She glared at Quin like an angry old lioness.

"Are you going to do as I advise?" she demanded.

"No; not until I get a job." Quin's jaw was set as firmly as hers, and their eyes measured each other's with equal determination.

"Well, then I 'll give you a job," she announced with sudden decision. "I 'll send you to China."

"To China?"

"Yes. Bartlett & Bangs has just opened a branch house in Shanghai. They are looking for a man to take charge of it. Your knowledge of the language would make up for your lack of experience. Besides, the sea voyage will do you good."

"Do you mean it?" cried Quinn eagerly. "Would Mr. Bangs agree?"

"Geoffrey Bangs would take you back at the factory to-morrow. But I don't want you there, under him. I want to turn you loose on China. It's the

only place I know that 's big enough to exhaust your energies. You will probably have the entire country plowing up its ancestors before spring."

"And what about you?" said Quin, turning eagerly to Eleanor. "Would you go with me?"

"*Will* I?" said Eleanor, her eyes dancing.

That night, when Miss Isobel was tucking Madam into bed, she made bold to ask her how she happened to give her consent to the wedding.

"Isobel," said Madam, cocking a wise old eye, "it might as well be now as later. When a man like Quinby Graham makes up his mind to marry a certain girl, the devil himself can't stop him!"

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